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Lovely Rita
Jay-Z protégé talks beauty PAGE 24

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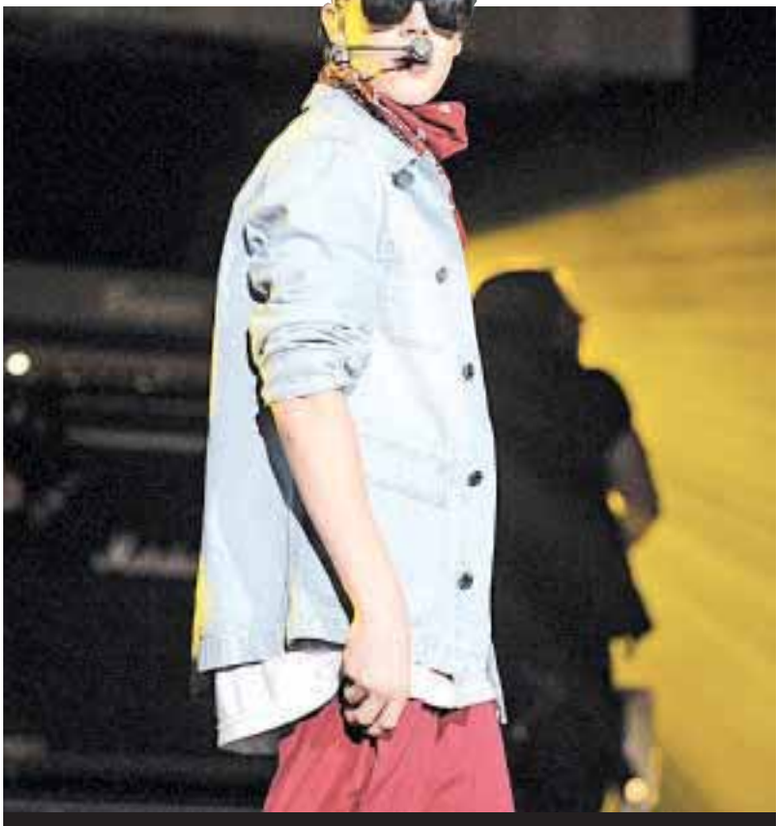

BIEBER MURDER PLOT?

Belieb it or not: Justin Bieber was the apparent target of a grisly murder plot concocted by an inmate in New Mexico, state police said yesterday. When asked to comment, the singer's management released a statement saying only that they take "every precaution to protect and ensure the safety of Justin and his fans." Story, page 10.

CHRIS MCKAY/GETTY IMAGES FOR JINGLE BALL 2012

Debate over city contracts gets heated

Standing by his CAO.

Mayor says he has full confidence in his administration

BERNICE PONTANILLA
bernice.pontanilla@metronews.ca

Winnipeg's chief administrative officer is battling back against claims by a local political consultant that city policies may have been broken in three cases of sole-sourced contracts.

In a press release sent Wednesday morning, Phil Sheegl said, "It is unfortunate that information provided by the city in a transparent, public forum has been manipulated and misinterpreted in this way."

Following the city council meeting, Sheegl said as CAO, it's his responsibility to make decisions and he wouldn't do anything differently.

"I consult with the experts, and we make our decisions accordingly," he said.

Quoted

"I think we're back in a world where we have to wonder how much pushing it's going to take before these guys are honest about how they're spending our money."

Brian Kelcey, former advisor to the mayor

"The contracts to Dunmore were sole-sourced, and that was done because they were retained as construction project managers for us and provide that service to us."

Brian Kelcey, who worked as an advisor to Mayor Sam Katz five years ago, said Sheegl's statement failed to respond to 14 points he raised about untendered contracts.

One is a contract worth more than $260,000 to Dunmore Corporation to manage the new police headquarters, which, Kelcey notes, "all available evidence suggests this contract was untendered, in violation of policy FM-002."

The city's policy states solicitation of competitive bids should happen if the estimated value of a consultant service will exceed $100,000.

"The city's response, so far, was a weasel response; it was an attempt to dodge clearly stated facts and clearly stated policies," said Kelcey, who attended part of the council meeting at city hall.

However, Sheegl said Dunmore is not providing a "consultant service," instead managing a project.

For his part, Katz said he has full confidence in the city's administration.

"Does that mean do I question them? Absolutely," he said.

Asked if that includes his CAO, Katz responded, "That includes the administration, period."

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Sewage

City council approves pipes to RMs

Winnipeg city council approved the extension of sewer pipes to neighbouring municipalities Wednesday.

City council debated a report to amend an agreement finalized in December of last year to extend water and sewer services to the municipality of Rosser. But that agreement was scaled back for other municipalities.

Council voted 12 in favour and four against the extension.

Coun. John Orlikow (River Heights-Fort Garry) said council's focus should be on enhancing local neighbourhoods, not rural municipalities, adding he's worried people will choose to move outside of Winnipeg.

Orlikow said council should be working on creating an atmosphere that makes people want to stay in the city. "That's where I think our focus should remain, making our individual neighbourhood grow, rather than helping the rural municipalities grow," he said.

Coun. Grant Nordman (St. Charles) said one of the reasons they're debating the motion is because the province requested the agreement, adding the city is the "big dog" in the situation and should be "good neighbours."

If he had an option between rural municipalities joining the city's pipes or "building a lagoon" next to the perimeter, Nordman said he would "select the pipe option every time."

Mayor Sam Katz said it's also about fixing an environmental issue. "In some areas in the capital region, there is raw sewage floating in the ditches."

GRAEME COLEMAN/METRO

City councillors stand in the chamber on Wednesday during a vote on the photo-radar issue. MEG CRANE/METRO

Photo radar to stay for another 7 years

Not everyone is happy. But city council agrees to sign a new photo-radar contract for $21 million

MEG CRANE
winnipeg@metronews.ca

Photo-radar cameras are here to stay for another seven years.

City councillors voted 14-2, with Coun. Scott Fielding (St. James-Brookland) and Coun. Brian Mayes (St. Vital) voting against the motion.

Mayes said many citizens in his ward would prefer to have police officers regulating drivers. "Traditional enforcement would have a greater impact," he said.

"I think that there are so many more added benefits that you have with traditional police officers versus the photo radar," agreed Fielding. He said officers can also check if the driver is drunk or involved in other illegal activities.

Fielding said 57 police officers could be put on the streets for the cost of photo radar, but according to Coun. Justin Swandel (St. Norbert), without revenue from photo radar, the city would actually have to cut back 50 or more police officers.

Fielding said traditional enforcement would more effectively change behaviours of speeders than photo radar.

"You're mad at yourself, or whoever did it, you pay your bill and you move on. But I don't think it does a bit of difference in terms of changing the attitudes," he said.

But Swandel says the program works. "It's proven. You can see it from the revenues going down that the behaviour does change."

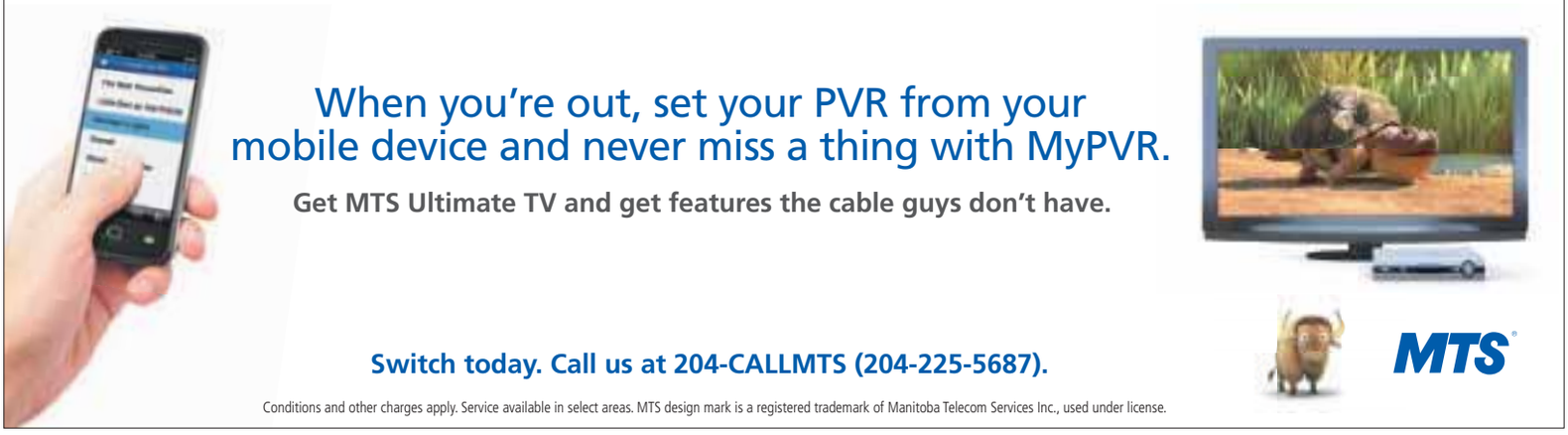
Coun. John Orlikow (River Heights-Fort Garry) said he would like to look at other options, but there is no opportunity at this point.

"We are presented with one option, which is to carry forward with the photo enforcement program," he said.

Quoted

"I've referred to this for a long time as the 'idiot tax.' I've got a few of them in my day. I've called myself an idiot."

Coun. Justin Swandel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Investigation

Teen shot in Winnipeg's West End

Police are investigating after a teenaged boy was shot in the West End Tuesday night.

The 15-year-old victim took himself to hospital after being shot in the lower body outside a home in the 400 block of Maryland Street around 7:40 p.m.

He is now listed in stable condition.

Police have not ruled out the possibility that the shooting is gang related.

Anyone with information is asked to call investigators at 204-986-6668, 204-986-2848, or CrimeStoppers at 204-786-TIPS. METRO

Stable condition

Condition of injured pedestrian improves

The condition of the woman hit by a car while crossing Portage Avenue in St. James Tuesday morning has improved. A 48-year-old woman was taken to hospital in unstable condition after being hit while crossing at a controlled intersection at Woodlawn Street and Portage Avenue around 7:30 a.m. She has since been upgraded to stable.

Police said eastbound vehicles on Portage Avenue were stopped at the red light when a car in the curb lane drove into the intersection as the light turned green and struck the woman. METRO

Charges laid

Police bust another pot grow-op

Police seized more than $650,000 worth of pot and growing equipment after raiding a Southdale home Tuesday.

Cops found 582 marijuana plants, 157 grams of dried pot, and growing equipment worth $15,000 in a home in the first 100 block of Collingwood Crescent.

A 48-year-old man is facing charges of producing a controlled substance, possessing a substance for the purpose of trafficking, theft of telecommunications, and possession of proceeds of crime. METRO

Holiday shoppers told to watch out for humbugs

Yuletide bandits.
Criminals not in Christmas spirit

Police are warning holiday shoppers to be careful when carrying cash and purchasing Christmas gifts after two separate robberies in the city on Tuesday.

Both robberies — one in the North End and the other in the Richmond West area — saw victims assaulted and then robbed shortly after withdrawing cash from a bank machine.

"We're all quite busy at this time of year, there's a lot of shopping going on, and members of the public might be in possession of different amounts of money," said police spokesperson Const. Jason Michalyshen. "Unfortunately, there are individuals that will seek out opportunities and potentially target individuals."

The first robbery saw a 51-year-old woman assaulted and robbed by two men as she walked home from shopping near Atlantic Avenue and Charles Street around 5:40 p.m., police say.

The victim, who received minor injuries in the attack, had recently taken cash out from a bank in the area.

In the second robbery, three men pulled up in a car and two suspects hopped out and assaulted a 21-year-old man who had just taken cash from a bank machine in the 2800 block of Pembina Highway around 7 p.m.

The victim, whose injuries were minor in nature, noticed his wallet was missing after the attack.

Police are looking for two aboriginal men in connection to the first robbery and two white men in connection to the second, and don't believe the two incidents are related.

Anyone with information on either robbery is asked to call police at 204-786-TIPS.

SHANE GIBSON/METRO

Winnipeg police spokesperson Const. Jason Michalyshen warns holiday shoppers to be careful after two people were robbed after using bank machines Tuesday. SHANE GIBSON/METRO

Warning

Police warn of alleged thief

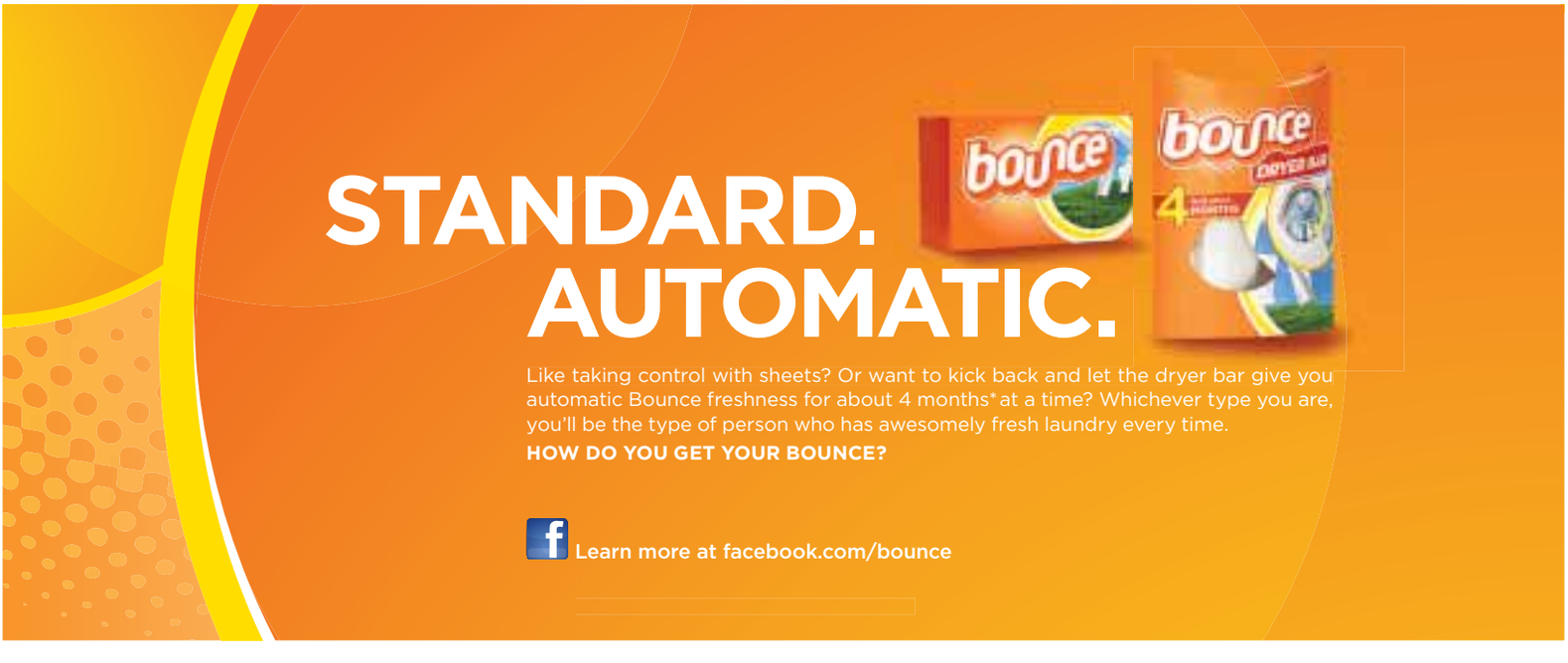
Police are warning Winnipeggers to be wary of a woman going door to door in northeast Winnipeg asking for help.

Several people in the Elmwood and East Kildonan areas have reported being robbed after allowing an unknown woman into their home.

Police say the woman gains entry by telling homeowners she needs either money to travel or a phone to call her boyfriend. She steals cellphones, credit cards, cameras or anything else of value while the homeowners are distracted.

The suspect is described as aboriginal, 26-years-old, five-foot-five, weighing 200 pounds, with shoulder length brown hair. She was last seen wearing a black jacket, with a light hoodie or sweater, blue jeans and runners.

Anyone who sees the suspect or has information should call police at 204-986-2857 or CrimeStoppers at 204-786-TIPS. METRO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SALES REP WOULD SNOWBOARD WITH NEIL YOUNG ANY DAY

ABOVE-AVERAGE JOE
Kerri Salki

Meet Dan. Hard work, a positive attitude and perseverance is what he's all about. The middle brother of three, he grew up on a farm near Morris, Man. After high school, he worked pumping gas, but took a second job at Vita Health putting expiry dates on bottles. Cut to 13 years later, where he is the senior account manager. He also loves to help others in need. Whether it's organizing a golf tournament and raffle for charity, collecting donations for victims of a fire, or just there with a shoulder to cry on, Dan is your man. He truly believes that you don't need money to make a difference — just a big heart. He wants to thank his parents for raising him and his brothers the way they did!

Name: Dan Bell-Gagnon

Occupation: Senior account manager
Last meal you cooked: Beer can chicken on the barbecue
Favourite song right now: Life from Our Lady Peace
Best book you ever read: Lord of the Rings
Skiing or snowboarding: Snowboarding! (But it hurts more when you wipeout)
Snow blower or shovel: Shovel
Secret to staying healthy: Cook your own food and eat out less
Coolest thing you've ever done: Meeting Neil Young backstage
Live in the future or go back in time? Back in time. Great movies and music.
Pet Peeve: When people eat with their mouth open!

Just because you're not famous, doesn't mean you're not a somebody! If you know an Above Average Joe you can email ksalki@hotmail.com

KERRI IS PART OF 'THE JOE SHOW WITH KERRI AND BUBBA' ON 102.3 CLEARFM FROM 5:30–9 A.M.

Winnipeg Average Joe Dan Bell-Gagnon raises a toast. METRO/HANDOUT

I Wanna Rock

Shannon Mullen and Dominique Scott as Sherrie and Drew perform in Rock of Ages in Winnipeg Tuesday night. The five-time nominated Tony Award musical hit the Centennial Concert Hall stage this week, complete with 80s hair and hair metal. The love story between a "small-town girl" and "just a boy, born and raised in south Detroit" has its final show in Winnipeg Thursday. Tickets are available at Ticketmaster. MEG CRANE/METRO

Godmother says she warned social workers

Phoenix Sinclair inquiry. Kim Edwards said she spoke out against young child being returned to dad

Quoted

"Everything about her world was at my home."

Kim Edwards, on taking in Phoenix Sinclair.

The godmother of a young Manitoba girl brutally beaten to death told an inquiry Wednesday that she warned social workers two years earlier not to return the child to her father, but they ignored her.

The testimony from Kim Edwards, who cared for Phoenix Sinclair for much of the girl's short life, is the latest evidence that social workers often failed to monitor Phoenix and didn't heed warnings about her troubled parents.

Edwards and her former husband, Rohan Stephenson, cared for Phoenix on many occasions, including the summer of 2003, when the child had been taken from her father, Steven Sinclair. Social workers were called to Sinclair's home and found him partying with suspected gang members. No one was caring for Phoenix, who was three years old at the time.

Two months later, a social worker named Stan Williams phoned Edwards and asked her whether she thought Sinclair, who was her longtime friend, was ready to parent again.

"I said, no, not really," Edwards testified.

"But then, the next day or the day after that, I got a phone call saying, 'We've decided to return Phoenix to her father.'"

Sinclair was drinking and was still grieving following the death of another child in 2001, Edwards said.

In 2004, Phoenix's mother, Samantha Kematch went to Edwards' home and took the young girl for what was supposed to be a short trip to a nearby mall and playground. She did not return.

Phoenix was beaten to death at the age of five by her mother and her mother's boyfriend, Karl McKay. Her death went undetected for nine months. **THE CANADIAN PRESS**

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Jury sees gory scenes in trial of Que. filmmaker

Graphic. The violent, sexually explicit works were based on a serial-killer character Remy Couture created and portrayed

Special-effects filmmaker Remy Couture THE CANADIAN PRESS

The jury hearing the trial of a Quebec special-effects artist charged with corrupting morals has had a chance to see his handiwork on Wednesday.

Remy Couture, a horror filmmaker and makeup artist, is charged with corrupting morals through the distribution, possession and production of obscene materials in a case that explores the boundaries of artistic expression.

The seven-woman, five-man jury silently watched hundreds of photos and a pair of videos that depict gruesome murders, torture, assaults and necrophilia — all with young female victims.

The jury is tasked with deciding whether the material in question is obscene and dangerous enough to actually incite people to act out what they see, as the Crown contends.

Couture argues his work has artistic value and the state's interference amounts to an infringement of his right to free expression.

The jury asked for the court to speed up the process of viewing the photos Wednesday. The judge approved the request. The photos were originally being shown for about 10 seconds each, but were eventually switched roughly every five.

Couture's trial got underway Monday with jury selection and two weeks have been set aside to hear evidence. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Holy tweet! Pope popular on Twitter

In this photo provided by the Vatican newspaper L'Osservatore Romano, Pope Benedict XVI pushes a button on a tablet at the Vatican on Wednesday. In perhaps the most drawn-out Twitter launch ever, the Pope's first tweet reads, "Dear friends, I am pleased to get in touch with you through Twitter. Thank you for your generous response. I bless all of you from my heart." The Pope has garnered more than one million followers in the eight languages of his account.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Basketball team beats opponent 107-2

An Indiana high school girls basketball team routed an opponent 107-2 this week, prompting an official with the state prep sports association to say he never wants to see anything so one-sided again.

Bloomington South coach Larry Winters told the Indianapolis Star there was no effort to embarrass Arlington or run up the score during Tuesday's game.

He says he played all nine of his players and didn't stop shooting because "that would have been more embarrassing" to Arlington, whose only points came on a free throw in the second quarter and another in the third.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PSY performs onstage during the Y100's Jingle Ball 2012 at the BB&T Center on Saturday in Miami.
MICHAEL KOVAC/GETTY IMAGES

'Gangnam Style' a top trending item for Google in 2012

Zeitgeist. Whitney Houston, Superstorm Sandy, iPad 3 and Kate Middleton round out year-end list of high-traffic searches

The world's attention wavered between the tragic and the silly in 2012, and along the way, millions of people searched the web to find out about a royal princess, the latest iPad, and a record-breaking skydiver.

Whitney Houston was the "top trending" search of the year, according to Google Inc.'s year-end "zeitgeist" report. Google's 12th annual roundup is "an in-depth look at the spirit of the times as seen through the billions of searches on Google over the past year," the company said in a blog post Wednesday.

People around the globe searched en masse for news about Houston's accidental drowning in a bathtub just before she was to perform at a pre-Grammy Awards party in February.

Google defines topics as "trending" when they garner a high amount of traffic over a sustained period of time.

Korean rapper PSY's Gangnam Style music video trotted into second spot, a testament to his self-deprecating giddy-up dance move. The video is approaching a billion views on YouTube.

Superstorm Sandy, the damaging storm that knocked out power and flooded parts of the East Coast in the midst of a U.S. presidential campaign, was third.

The next biggest trending searches globally were a pair of threes: the iPad 3 tablet from Apple Inc. and Diablo 3, a popular video game.

Rounding out the Top 10 were Kate Middleton, who made news with scandalous photos and a royal pregnancy; the 2012 Olympics in London; Amanda Todd, a Canadian teen who was found dead of an apparent suicide in October after being bullied online and Michael Clarke Duncan, the Green Mile actor who died of a heart attack in September at age 54; and "BBB12," the 12th edition of Big Brother Brasil.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

What do you meme?

Facebook and Yahoo's top trending ideas or phrases (popularly known as "memes") include:

- **YOLO.** It means "You Only Live Once"—used both sincerely and ironically.
- **Binders full of women.** Mitt Romney's awkward description of his search for women cabinet members.

Dead people 'liking' Facebook sites

A veteran Web developer has documented cases of dead people mysteriously "liking" a Facebook site.

Bernard Meisler, who is also an author and educator, tracked down a vegetarian who "liked" McDonald's and a Facebook user without a car who "liked" Subaru.

Facebook recycles "likes" of people alive and dead so yours can pop up at any time unless you act to block them, a Facebook spokeswoman told Torstar News Service.

Meisler had become suspicious when non-English speakers started "liking" the Facebook page for his English-language arts magazine Sensitive Skin.

"This was suboptimal — not to mention extremely weird — for a literary magazine written in English," Meisler wrote Wednesday in an article on the tech website ReadWrite.com.

Two friends were outraged to find posthumous Facebook "likes" for people they knew. In one, a man who hated big corporations had "liked" Discover six months after he died. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

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North Korea flies high, UN brings it down to earth

Pyongyang jubilant over rocket. But Security Council warns of reprisals over successful launch

Rocket-happy North Korea got an angry rocket on Wednesday … from the United Nations Security Council.

It condemned the North Koreans' successful rocket launch and said it will urgently consider "an appropriate response."

But whether that response includes new sanctions against the North — which the United States and its European allies are seeking — depends first and foremost on China, the North's closest ally.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei said in Beijing the council's response should be "prudent and moderate and conducive to maintaining stability and avoiding escalation of the situation."

The Security Council said the launch violates Security Council resolutions adopted after North Korea's nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009.

Secretive North Korea also broke a ban on "any launch using ballistic missile technology," it complained.

The successful rocket launch is widely seen as a test that takes North Korea one step closer to being capable of sending a nuclear-tipped warhead as far as California.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Quoted

The launch "constitutes a very dangerous challenge to … the security situation in the Korean peninsula and northeast Asia."
Kim Sook,
South Korea's UN ambassador

The flames of anger burn in South Korea over the North's rocket launch. In Seoul, protesters burn a mock rocket only to see police move in with fire extinguishers. South Koreans fear for the security of their country. AHN YOUNG-JOON/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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That F-35 headache just won't go away. Defence Minister Peter MacKay takes part in a Parliament Hill news conference on the controversial fighter jets on Wednesday. FRED CHARTRAND/THE CANADIAN PRESS

F-35 headache? Take 'reset' pill

Bombshell report.
Tories to review whole deal amid a warning costs could soar to $45.8 billion over 42 years

The Harper government has "hit the reset button" in the F-35 mess.

A bombshell report has exposed the cascading multibillion-dollar cost of the stealth aircraft.

The long-awaited KPMG report warns the Lockheed Martin-built F-35s could cost Canada as much as $45.8 billion over 42 years.

The report says National Defence neglected to build a large enough financial cushion into the plan to replace Canada's aging fighter fleet.

And the paltry-by-comparison $9 billion the department set aside likely won't be enough to cover the planned purchase of 65 jets.

Now the entire process will be reviewed, Public Works Minister Rona Ambrose said Wednesday.

"The next step is a full review of options," Ambrose told a news conference.

"We have hit the reset button and are taking the time to do a complete assessment of all available options.''

Defence Minister Peter MacKay said the government will ensure "that balance is maintained between the military needs and taxpayer interests.

"Ultimately, our government will get the best plane for the armed forces, for our pilots and for Canadian taxpayers."

The NDP's opposition critics were unmoved, however, insisting the government was steadfastly refusing to admit the whole process has been fumbled.

"You can't move on, you can't move forward until you've admitted that you've got a problem and that you've made mistakes,'' said Matthew Kellway, the party's procurement critic.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Quoted

"What we haven't heard today is what we wanted to hear, that there will be an open competition for a replacement for the CF-18"

Matthew Kellway,
NDP procurement critic.

Numbers game

65

The number of jets in the government's planned F-35 purchase. But the soaring costs may force a reduction to 55 planes.

Wire cash, please

Skype scam almost pays off

Police are warning people to be on guard against fraudsters using Skype.

Kingston police say a resident got a Skype video call from a man identifying himself as a doctor held prisoner in Syria.

The supposed doctor said if $2,500 was not transferred to a Western Union office in Lebanon, he would be beheaded. The victim wired funds — but later contacted police and stopped the transfer.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Software icon

McAfee booted from Guatemala

Anti-virus software founder John McAfee arrived in Miami Wednesday after being deported from Guatemala.

He had sneaked into Guatemala from Belize, where authorities want to question him in a homicide.

Late Wednesday, a posting on McAfee's website announced that he was at a hotel in Miami's upscale South Beach neighbourhood.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Nuclear impasse

Iran pressured on two fronts

A UN inspection team Wednesday pressured Iran to allow it to visit Parchin, a site it suspects may have been used for nuclear weapons experiments.

The team suspects Iran has tested conventional explosives there that could be used to detonate a nuclear weapon.

Meanwhile, European Union negotiators pushed for a new meeting with the Iranians in a bid to achieve a diplomatic solution. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Dad who killed his children freed

A father who stabbed his children to death will be a free man, less than four years later.

Guy Turcotte has been granted his release, with conditions, from a psychiatric institution. The cardiologist had been found not criminally responsible for killing his two children and, since last year's court verdict, he had been in Montreal's Pinel institute.

His case provoked a torrent of outrage in Quebec, where Turcotte is a household name.

He had admitted to stabbing his young children 46 times but said he didn't remember doing it, hadn't wanted to do it and had been experiencing blackouts on the night of the killings.

He said he was distraught over the breakup of his marriage. His wife had left him for a family friend who was her personal trainer.

Turcotte's release was unanimously approved today by a three-member panel. He will have to get annual mental-health checkups, continue his therapy, stay out of trouble and avoid all contact with his ex-wife. But his legal woes are not over yet: The Crown has filed to appeal the 2011 court verdict.

The Tories plan to introduce a bill in the House of Commons early next year that would make the safety of the public the paramount factor for review boards that determine an offender's release.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Criminal code plans

Several cases like Turcotte's, including the 2008 bus-beheading in Manitoba and the Schoenborn child-killings in B.C., have prompted a federal policy change. The Harper government plans to make it more difficult for mentally ill offenders found not criminally responsible to be released from custody.

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Singer Justin Bieber at a Dec. 5 event in Philadelphia. An alleged plot to murder the singer in November was foiled by police. LISA LAKE/GETTY IMAGES FILE

Alleged plot to murder Justin Bieber thwarted

Disclaimer.
Warning: This story contains graphic details

A police affidavit alleges that two prison inmates and a nephew were hatching a plot to murder Bieber and his director of security while the singer was in New York for shows on Nov. 28 and 29.

Details of the grisly plan — which involved strangling two other victims with a paisley tie and then castrating them — were revealed Wednesday in an affidavit for arrest obtained by New Mexico State Police.

But the plot may have been thwarted by a missed highway exit and a pair of recorded phone calls between an inmate and one of the accused.

According to the affidavit, the plan was hatched behind bars after inmate Dana Martin was transferred from a Florida prison to the Southern New Mexico Corrections Facility in April.

Martin, 45, serving a life sentence for the rape and murder of a 15-year-old girl in Vermont, was reportedly obsessed with Bieber. He had written him letters and even had a tattoo of the singer on his leg.

He allegedly recruited Mark Aaron Staake, 41, a fellow inmate at the time, after Staake noticed the tattoo on his leg. The plan was to kill four people in two states, with Bieber as the main target.

Oddly, the details were spilled on Nov. 20, when Martin asked to speak to police, telling them Staake (who had been released on probation on Oct. 22) and his nephew, Tanner Ruane, 23, had been planning to commit the first two murders — neither of them Bieber. New Mexico police declined to identify those intended victims.

Martin is serving consecutive life sentences for murders committed in 2000. The strangulation murder of the 15-year-old girl was a "case of jealousy," police told The Associated Press.

TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Suspected mastermind

- **Manipulator.** The police affidavit describes Martin as "a very good manipulator," who convinced Staake that he had access to large sums of money and a multimillion-dollar home and property, where Staake and Ruane could hide out.
- **Connections.** He also told Staake that he had connections to Chinese gangs in New York, who had "sanctioned" the murders, according to the affidavit.

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Airlines attempt to put the fun back in flying with cocktails

Air travel may be getting more stressful, but the drinks are getting tastier. ERIC RISBERG/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In-flight perks. Lost baggage? Delayed connections? At least you can have a mojito

Airlines have found a way to take the edge off the stress of flying and make a few extra bucks along the way: Fancy new cocktails, craft beers and elegant wines.

The drinks advertised in the back of in-flight magazines — or on sleek seatback touchscreens — are starting to resemble those served at nightclubs.

• Virgin America offers Grandma's Coffee, an iced cappuccino with Jack Daniels whiskey for $9 US. Its beer selection includes San Francisco-based 21st Amendment and Black Star from Whitefish, Mont. Both cost $7.

• US Airways has partnered with mixer company Stirrings to sell mojitos and cosmos for $8 each.

• Delta offers the Sky Breeze, which is vodka, Fresca and a splash of cranberry-apple juice over ice for $7. It also sells small-batch bourbon from Woodford Reserve for $7.

Flying isn't what it used to be. Long lines, ever-changing security rules and limited overhead bin space have all made travelling much more stressful.

It's no wonder many passengers are looking for a little escape. Airlines, which created much of this anxiety in the first place, are happy to oblige.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Quoted

"It's simply a matter of finding a way to get people to spend money. They see people spending $12, $14, $15 or more for fancy martinis, cosmopolitans or other beverages on the ground."

Henry Harteveldt, a travel-industry analyst with Hudson Crossing

White House, Congress remain far apart on deal, Boehner says

U.S. House Speaker John Boehner said Wednesday that "serious differences" remain between him and President Barack Obama in negotiations on averting automatic spending cuts and tax increases that economists fear could send the U.S. economy over the so-called fiscal cliff.

Boehner's comments came as top Democrats pushed back on GOP demands for tough steps like raising the Medicare eligibility age and curbing the cost-of-living adjustment for Social Security.

Boehner and Obama spoke on the phone twice Tuesday, a day after the president offered to reduce his initial demand for $1.6 trillion US in higher tax revenue over a decade to $1.4 trillion US. But Obama continued to insist that much of the revenue comes from raising top tax rates on the wealthy.

Boehner countered later Tuesday with another offer that aides to the Ohio Republican said stuck close to a document delivered to the White House a week ago. A top White House aide, Rob Nabors, came to the Capitol to respond.

Boehner on Wednesday offered a sour assessment less than three weeks before the cliff would strike the economy with $500 billion US worth of spending cuts and higher tax rates if left in place through September.

"There were some offers that were exchanged back and forth yesterday and the president and I had pretty frank conversations about just how far apart we are," the Ohio Republican said after a closed-door meeting with fellow GOP lawmakers in which he advised them not to make plans for the week after Christmas. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Quoted

"I think it's getting worse, not better."

House GOP Whip Kevin McCarthy on the likelihood of averting the fiscal cliff.

Anti-corruption. Police detain Serbian retail tycoon

Serbia's billionaire retail tycoon and one of the Balkan country's most influential figures was detained Wednesday in what the nationalist government said is a major anti-corruption sweep.

Miroslav Miskovic, one of the richest people in impoverished Serbia, is the owner of Delta Holding company, which deals with retail, real estate, insurance and agriculture business in Serbia and the rest of the Balkans.

He was detained by police along with his son, Marko, and eight other people in connection with the privatization of several road construction and repair companies in 2005, during which the suspects allegedly "gained illegal profit" of about $39 million US, prosecutors said.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

EU membership at stake

- Serbia's nationalist government has launched several anti-corruption probes since coming to power in June. Critics say they have been mostly aimed at political opponents and allies of the country's previous pro-Western leadership.
- But Serbia must fight graft if it wants to fulfil its goal of becoming a member of the European Union.

Trains

Bill Gates ups ownership in CN

Bill Gates has increased his overall stake in Canadian National Railway Co. to about 12 per cent.

Cascade Investment LLC, a company owned by the billionaire founder of tech giant Microsoft, says it has acquired an additional 13,670 shares of Canada's largest railway for $1.25 million.

The investment company now owns a total of 43 million CN shares representing 10 per cent of the company. Gates controls an additional 1.98 per cent of CN stock through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, a charitable trust.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

StatsCan report

Job vacancies rose in September

Statistics Canada says the number of job vacancies has grown on a year-over-year basis. The federal agency says there were 267,000 vacancies in September, up 19,000 from September 2011.

As a result, it says there were 5.3 unemployed people for every vacancy that month, down from 5.7 a year earlier. Statistics Canada says the decline in the ratio of unemployment to job vacancies was all the result of the increase in vacancies.

Provincially, the highest ratio of unemployed people to job vacancies was in Newfoundland and Labrador, where there were 11.2 people out of work for every open position.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

European Union

Ministers edge closer to banking oversight pact

European Union finance ministers moved closer Wednesday to creating a single supervisor for their banks after France and Germany said they had largely patched up their differences over the new body's powers.

The agreement on a banking supervisor is a vital part of European countries' efforts to protect themselves from future financial crises. Recently, it seemed unlikely a year-end deadline to set up the supervisor would be met because of disagreements between France and Germany.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A young girl looks at a Sony ebook at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October in Frankfurt, Germany. Sales of dedicated e-reading devices are in an "alarmingly precipitous decline," research firm IHS iSuppli says. GETTY IMAGES FILE

Consumers turn the page on dedicated e-readers

Tech trends. Rapid decline in sales is part of move to general-purpose devices such as tablets

Sales of dedicated e-reading devices like the black-and-white Kindles are in an "alarmingly precipitous decline" this year after five years of rapid growth, research firm IHS iSuppli says.

Full-blown tablets with colour screens are behind the decline, the firm says. Amazon.com Inc. now sells tablets under the Kindle brand, and Barnes & Noble Inc. has added tablets to its Nook e-reader line.

IHS expects shipments of e-readers to fall from 23.2 million last year to 14.1 million this year.

The rapid rise and now rapid decline of e-readers is unusual even for the volatile consumer electronics industry, says IHS analyst Jordan Selburn, but it's indicative of the broader trend of single-purpose devices like e-readers and cameras losing out to general-purpose ones like tablets and smartphones.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Canadian fallout. U.S. fiscal cliff imperils energy, mining sectors

A plunge by Washington over the so-called fiscal cliff would hit Canadian miners and energy companies particularly hard since a slowdown in the U.S. economy would also drag down prices for base metals and oil.

Paul Taylor, chief investment officer for fundamental equities at BMO Asset Management, said Wednesday it will be the cyclical sectors that will be most affected if U.S. lawmakers fail to reach a deal to avoid the automatic tax hikes and spending cuts set to kick in next year.

"We are very much dependent on energy and materials which represent, of course, nearly 50 per cent of the Canadian equity market by market cap," Taylor said.

"And with slower U.S. — and read from that slower global economic activity — you would have to expect that the price of base metals and energy on which we depend so heavily would be affected negatively and they would certainly lose a bit." THE CANADIAN PRESS

Consumer concern

- A new poll by Sun Life Financial suggests 63 per cent of Canadians are concerned our economy will be hurt if a deal to avert the fiscal cliff is not reached.

Safety concerns

Honda recalls 870,000 vehicles

Honda is recalling about 870,000 minivans and SUVs worldwide because they can roll away even though drivers have removed the keys from the ignition.

Honda Canada says the recall will involve approximately 23,300 Honda Odyssey and 12,400 Honda Pilot vehicles from the 2003-04 model years and about 16,600 Acura MDX vehicles from the 2003-06 model years in Canada. "Honda Canada has received several complaints about such failures in these vehicles, but has received no reports of accidents or injuries related to this issue," the company said. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Social media

Facebook to make privacy controls more user-friendly

Facebook is trying to make its privacy controls easier to find and understand in an effort to turn the world's largest social network into a more discreet place.

The fine-tuning announced Wednesday will include several revisions that will start rolling out to Facebook Inc.'s more than one billion users in the next few weeks.

The biggest change will be a new "privacy shortcuts" section that will appear as a tiny lock on the right-hand side at the top of people's news feeds.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Market Minute

DOLLAR 101.55¢ (+0.15¢)

Natural gas: $3.40 US (-1¢)
Dow Jones: 13,245.45 (-2.99)

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John Mazerolle
metronews.ca

Friends, Romulans, countrymen! Lend me your pointy ears. I come not to bury Star Trek (frankly, Voyager did that), but to praise it.

Star Trek: The Next Generation is on Netflix now, and I'm completely engaged. To my surprise and delight, many of my Facebook friends have independently made it their priority No. 1, and it's resulted in the sort of long, passionate comment threads usually only seen under shared photos of ultrasounds and/or Stephen Harper.

I've complained in this space before that too much modern pop culture is just the repackaging of ideas we've seen before. But I can't deny the movies I've been anticipating most lately: Bobcaygeon The Movie (documentary based on a rock ballad); Les Miserables (movie adaptation of a musical adaptation of a French musical adaptation of a novel); and Star Trek Into Darkness (sequel of a reboot of a movie version of a TV series).

TNG regeneration

Going back to the future is a pleasant reminder of my not-so-dazed-and-confused youth — I get older, the Enterprise crew stay the same age.

I can get all snobby at Men in Black 3, but if it's John's Crap: The Sequel, then my objections mysteriously disappear. In truth, if they made a movie of The Wire, I'd probably show up in costume (rumpled suit with vomit stains).

So, I apologize for my earlier complaints. Star Trek: Regurgitation is just fine by me.

I was the perfect age for the original run of TNG — 11 years old when it debuted as a juvenile imitation of the original series, and 17 when it was over, by then a Hugo Award-winning masterpiece beloved by virgins worldwide. So going back to the future is a pleasant reminder of my not-so-dazed-and-confused youth — I get older, the Enterprise crew stay the same age.

In a world where people no longer meet in town halls and churches, some of us get our sense of community by discussing the legends of Vulcans or Orcs or hard-drinking ad execs. Whether that's a step forward or back I'll leave to you.

But what fun to get lost in the minutia of a 24th century where anything can happen except good roles for women. How wonderful to laugh at the stuff they got wrong (Picard's personal computer is amusingly thick) and got right (Picard and Riker discuss a European union). How satisfying to gauge a fellow Trekker's knowledge level by their recognition of "Make it so" (beginner), "THERE. ARE. FOUR. LIGHTS!" (intermediate), and "All Husnock — everywhere" (expert).

My excitement led me to decide that I'm going to watch every worthwhile Star Trek episode, which after several hours perusing reviews and ratings online I've determined is 30 episodes of the original, six episodes of the animated series, 54 episodes of TNG, 69 of DS9, 29 of Voyager and 25 of Enterprise. (I just hope the experience doesn't turn me into a nerd.)

It's good to boldly go where I've already been before.

Taking us out of here, again: The cast of Star Trek: The Next Generation.
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Love is sweeter by the dozen

KIN CHEUNG/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

12/12/12 SWAK

Last triple-date to wed your mate

A couple kiss during a mass wedding ceremony at the Peak in Hong Kong, on Wednesday. At least 700 couples were expected to get married on the date 12/12/12, the last such triple-date in this year in Hong Kong as they believe the date will bring them everlasting love. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

When the clock strikes 12:12

Twelve-word vows say it all

KEITH SRAKOCIC/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Federal Judge Donetta Ambrose, left, signals that there are five more minutes before she starts the wedding between Deputy U.S. Marshal Brian Allen, centre, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Amy Johnson in federal court in Pittsburgh on Wednesday. Ambrose started their wedding at 12:12 p.m. at the couple's request, where they exchanged 12-word vows on 12/12/12. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Chinese numerology

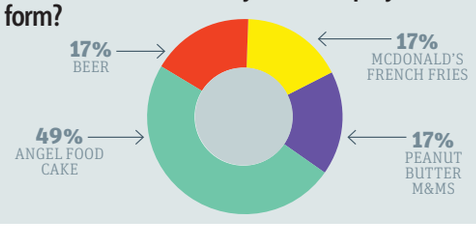
"One is considered a yang number, while two is considered a yin number. Combining the two can offer new couples balance."

Marketing firm Back Bar USA in a press release announcing its $1,212,120 Las Vegas wedding package that included the use of a private jet, watches and earrings for the wedding party, and dinner at a Michelin-rated restaurant.

Metropolitan Panel

Register at metropolitanpanel.ca and take the quick poll

Pizza Hut is making a pizza-scented perfume. What other foods would you like in spray-on form?



Twitte

@obbykhan60: Is it taking anyone else 597635 hrs to get downtown today? #itsjustsnowpeople #learnhowtodrive

@Alannaxh: Driving with all season tires in #Winnipeg is a thrill in life I do not enjoy

@boobabler: In Winnipeg airport looking for helicopter charter options to portage place mall to avoid the stink bomb cab ride.

@CAAManitoba: Turn on those lights this morning! It's not for YOU to see, it is so OTHERS can see YOU! #Winnipeg #tips

@alinasarahh: Normally takes 20 minutes to get to work, took 45 minutes because it snowed. Snow doubles #winnipeg travel #sillydrivers

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Penner hits nostalgic notes with new show

All-ages entertainer. Beloved singer tweaks his repertoire to appeal to the adults who loved him when they were children

BACKSTAGE PASS
Jared Story
winnipeg@metronews.ca

This cat isn't going away anytime soon.

Six years ago, beloved children's entertainer Fred Penner started touring Canada's universities, playing to the now adult audience that grew up with his songs and his syndicated TV show Fred Penner's Place.

"The concept is to reconnect with those young people who grew up with me in the formative time of life," Penner, 66, says during a sit-down interview at Polo Park.

"As an adult, you start analyzing where you came from and the interactions you had with people of value along the way. Inevitably, it goes back to your childhood. You say, 'Who are my influences?' And the common bond comes down to, 'Hey, remember that guy who crawled through the log?'"

Penner's adult show includes a few original songs he wouldn't normally do for a family audience, plus a selection of cover songs from his generation, including numbers by The Beatles and Steely Dan.

Of course, grown-up fans will still hear childhood favourites like Sandwiches and The Cat Came Back. In fact, Penner says his adult audiences "meow" magnificently.

"You want to rediscover that youthful exuberance, that joy, that love that you had as a child that gets masked as you grow up from all the crap that comes upon you," Penner says.

"You want to go back to a simpler and more basic time of life and that's what happens at these shows, the innocence returns for a short time."

Innocent but not infantile.

No offence to Sharon, Lois and Bram, but "skinnamarink-a-dinky-dink" doesn't exactly hold up with the grown-up crowd.

"I hope what I've always presented is not a kiddies entertainer, not young childish songs, but songs that have substance," Penner says.

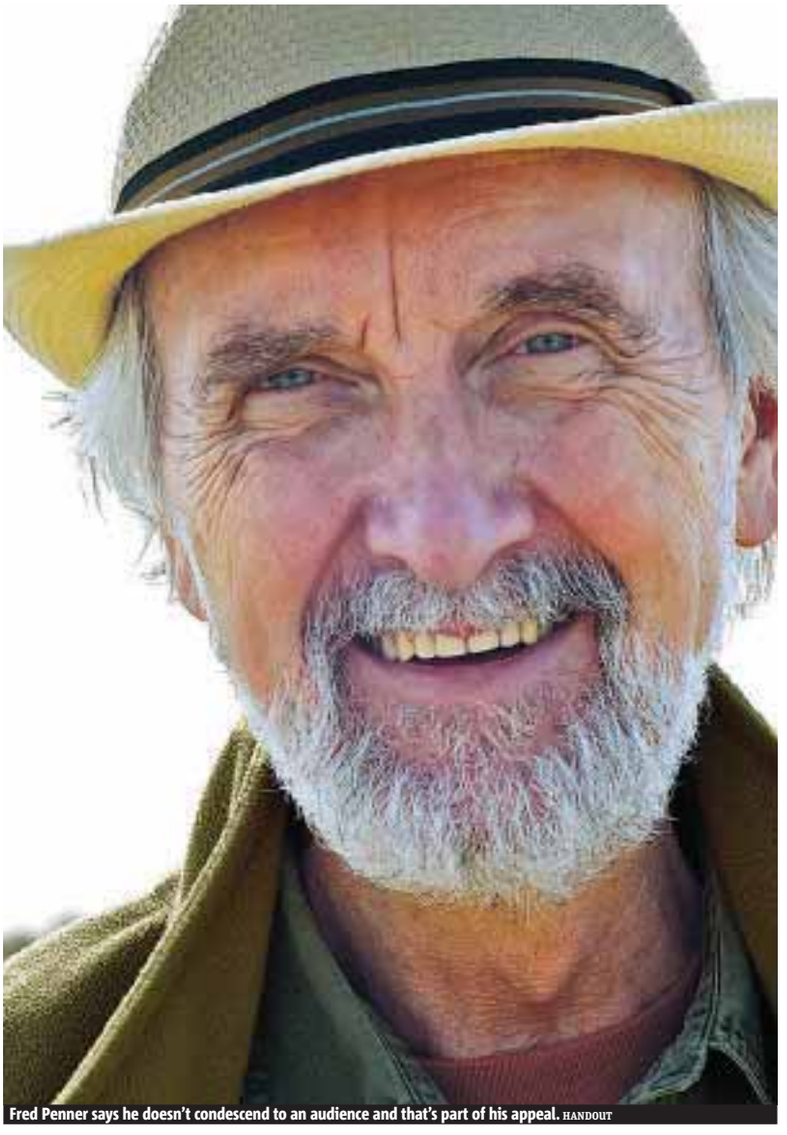
"I don't condescend to an audience. I talk to an audience no different than I talk to you."

"It's all about dialogue and keeping that open and communicative," he continues.

"I think that kind of energy is understood on a different level. You realize it's not just for the kids, it's for the parents and grandparents too. It's about bringing this together as a family. That's timeless."

If you go...

Penner plays child-friendly and inner-child-friendly concerts this Saturday at the West End Cultural Centre. Kids show tickets are $12, adult show tickets are $15 and are available at the WECC, Ticketmaster, Music Trader and the Winnipeg Folk Festival Music Store. Show times are 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. respectively.



Fred Penner says he doesn't condescend to an audience and that's part of his appeal. HANDOUT

Quoted

"You want to rediscover that youthful exuberance, that joy, that love that you had as a child that gets masked as you grow up ..."

Fred Penner on his show for grown-ups

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Newcomers to the Tolkien universe discuss their place among new class

The Hobbit. Martin Freeman and Richard Armitage talk about how Peter Jackson's crew was very welcoming to new cast

HEIDI PATALANO
Metro World News

British actor Richard Armitage plays Dwarves' leader Thorin Oakenshield in the film The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey. CHRIS YOUNG/THE CANADIAN PRESS

In director Peter Jackson's eyes, Martin Freeman was always Bilbo Baggins. While Ian Holm does reprise his role as the older, wiser Bilbo in The Hobbit, there was something about the veteran of The Office and the BBC's Sherlock series that made Freeman an irresistible choice for this younger, more anxious version of Tolkien's most famous character.

"Martin is the only person that we ever wanted for that role and that was really before we met Martin," says Jackson. "We just felt he had qualities that would be perfect for Bilbo — that essential kind of fussy English, slightly repressed quality. We thought he'd be very good at playing that. He's a dramatic actor. He's not a comedian. But he's a dramatic actor who has a very rare comedic skill."

While not originally a fan of the books himself, Freeman was eager to join an already bonded cast and crew.

"My experience of Middle-earth was through the films which I think are still great pieces of work," Freeman says. "From my point of view of turning up and being involved with it, it was a pleasure to be with Pete. It was a pleasure to be with a crew that committed, to get to know actors I knew a little bit from home, but not very well who subsequently became friends … It was great. It had a way of not being intimidating."

Also joining the cast was British actor Richard Armitage, who takes on the character of Thorin, a would-be dwarf king out to avenge the deaths of his father and grandfather. Despite the fact that so many of the cast and crew from The Lord of the Rings series had returned for these three films, Armitage felt the loving embrace of a committed group of artists.

"In terms of coming into an existing franchise, we were just always made to feel very welcome, like we were coming into a family," he says.

"So many people returned that were working on the Rings trilogy. It was just very easy."

Easy in one sense, but quite daunting in another. With the cast committed to a year and a half of shooting, the actual filming process was no casual stroll through Rivendell.

"Working with Peter, the thing that I've realized is that just when you think you've given him everything you've got, he asks you for more and somehow you find it," says Armitage.

"My own limitations of myself, I've had to let those drop because there's always more to give."

Quoted

"In terms of coming into an existing franchise, we were just always made to feel very welcome, like we were coming into a family."

Richard Armitage
Talking about stepping into the Lord of the Rings production group.

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I dream a dream ... of an Oscar

Les Misérables. How exactly does a costume designer go about dressing three A-list actors in three roles of a lifetime?

RICHARD PECKETT
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"We used a vibrant red dress, which was particularly striking styled with (Anne Hathaway's) short cropped hair," Delgado says.

"He wears a uniform pretty much for the entire film," Delgado says of Russell Crowe.

Anne Hathaway

Les Mis in numbers

2,200
costumes in total

1,500
historic outfits made from scratch

$1.1 M
spent on wardrobe overall

Les Misérables hasn't hit theatres yet, but there's already talk of Academy Awards.

"The whole thing is a very big tour de force for an Oscar," says its costume designer Paco Delgado, who has worked on critical hits such as Bad Education and The Skin I Live In.

Delgado thinks that the early rave reviews come down to the fact that it's the first film version of a musical to feature live recording as opposed to lip synched performances of pre-recorded songs.

But the movie's starry team might also have something to do with it. The Oscar winner Tom Hooper, best known for The King's Speech, directed Hugh Jackman, Russell Crowe and Anne Hathaway in what critics are calling roles of a lifetime.

"When Anne Hathaway sang I Dreamed a Dream, I was moved to tears," Delgado said.

Delgado talked Metro through how he underscored the movie's three most emotive performances with costume.

The inspiration

"Costumes always have a theatrical kind of feeling, whereas clothes are very real, and what I tried to do with this movie is to get into the skin of the character whom I'm dressing," Delgado explains.

Anne Hathaway: Distressed clothes

You'd have to be living under a rock to have missed all the entertainment headlines about Anne Hathaway's 25 pound weight loss for her role as the tragic emaciated Fantine. It turns out the clothes went through the ringer as well.

"We would sand down the fabrics and bleach the materials," he explains. "And we even used blow torches to make the clothes look as though they'd been through a lot of stress," says Delgado.

"Fantine starts outs as a pretty girl in cotton mousseline dresses, which are old but still pretty, and gradually we introduce coarser materials to show her descent into prostitution," says the designer.

Hugh Jackman: Bringing the lowly to life

Hugh Jackman's Jean Valjean is a former convict and an outcast. So Delgado used "blood red rags, rough linens and materials like hessian and hemp to reflect his social position and discomfort."

"After he breaks parole, Valjean becomes more sophisticated in his dress, particularly during his ascension to village mayor," Delgado explains. "There's less grey and we use fine wools."

Russell Crowe: Dressing a black soul

"He wears a uniform pretty much for the entire film. So he's not the most interesting character (to dress) in that respect," Delgado says. "Russell really wanted to show a man who was becoming bitter with age, so we decided to gradually darken his uniform until it was almost as black as his soul."

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Do you hear what we hear?

Weighing up this year's festive albums. As usual, the latest holiday releases are a mixed bag, but Metro helps you sort the naughty from the nice

PAT HEALY
Metro World News in Boston

Sufjan Stevens' version of Christmas is an alternative one. ALL IMAGES HANDOUT

A Different Kind of Christmas – Various artists

Naughty: You're probably not familiar with many of the artists on these 23 tracks. Audio Stepchild? Renzo Charlez? Freshwadda Brooks? Have all of these great hip-hop artists been hiding on the North Pole until now?

Nice: This compilation comes courtesy of Hoopla Worldwide/LRT/INgrooves Fontana ... all imprints we had also never heard of before now. But some of the participants have affiliations with Parliament Funkadelic and Nappy Roots. The beats here mostly have a G-Funk feel with little samples of carols thrown in and the rhymes are super positive. Check out 1st Blood and Buffalo Stille's Some Kentucky Bourbon on Christmas Eve and Da Product and J Bill's It Seems Like We Forgot for some of the most festive holiday hip-hop since Run DMC's Christmas in Hollis.

Silver & Gold: Songs for Christmas, Vols. 6-10 – Sufjan Stevens

Naughty: Is Sufjan Stevens trying to take up all our free time this season? Sure, this is a gorgeous collection of 58 holiday-ish tracks (we say "ish" because how is Prince's Alphabet Street a holiday song?). But keep in mind that Stevens recorded these songs over six years. Listeners may want to pace themselves too.

Nice: There are a few songs on here that are the sonic equivalent of sugar plums dancing in your head. Draw the curtains, plug in your tree and zone out to the beautifully textured 10-minute plus opuses Christmas Unicorn and The Child with the Star on His Head.

Cheers, It's Christmas – Blake Shelton

Naughty: His role as a coach on The Voice has earned Blake Shelton a new base of fans who wouldn't ordinarily like his brand of country music. That said, if you don't ordinarily like his brand of country music, you won't like this album.

The Grinch says ...

- **This Christmas – John Travolta and Olivia Newton John**

If this collection came out in 1980 then maybe there would be a reason for it to exist, but in 2012 there's no need for these 13 tracks. The forced smiles while sipping cocoa on the cover shows that their old chemistry is now gone. We don't like to be Grinchy, but this is the sonic equivalent of reindeer poop.

Nice: Shelton is such a likable personality that this is highly tolerable stuff. Plus, he handpicked some of the most likable side-kicks to guide his sleigh, like Reba, Kelly Clarkson, his wife Miranda Lambert and the king of palatable Christmas charisma, Michael Bublé, who co-wrote one of the songs here. Basically, the cover pic of Shelton in front of the fireplace says it all: It's old-fashioned, steeped in tradition, comfortable and not exactly cool.

Isn't This World Enough? – Various Artists

Naughty: The problem with this post-record industry climate is that there aren't enough Scroogey label CEOs to say, "Yer holiday song stinks!" Therefore, this 14-song comp from the Nettwerk Music Group has a few stinkers from Ash Koley and Jay Brannan. Bah humbug!

Nice: The title track, by the Scottish six-piece Admiral Fallow, might not be the most obvious holiday song (sample lyric: "You don't need to hang your hat on belief in bumper stickers") but there's something classic about it that makes it malleable, the way that Put a Little Love In Your Heart kind of became a holiday staple after it was used in Scrooged. Also worth noting: This compilation kicks off with a rockin' Fun. tune!

Holidays Rule – Various Artists

Naughty: Speaking of compilations that start with a song by Fun., the We Are Young trio have spread themselves too thin for the holidays. With their track, they take a Sleigh Ride down Broadway and make an ill-advised turn into '80s territory. Rufus Wainwright and Sharon Van Etten also deserve a lump of coal for their empty version of Baby, It's Cold Outside.

Nice: This one delivers the most bang for your buck. The Shins run McCartney's Wonderful Christmastime through a Beach Boys filter and turn it into something great. McCartney himself is on here too. Other great performances include Calexico, Eleanor Friedberger and Andrew Bird.

Merry Christmas, Baby – Rod Stewart

Naughty: Stewart exhumes the voice of Ella Fitzgerald for a duet of What Are You Doing New Year's Eve? Let's just hope there is no "live" performance, a la Virtual 2Pac.

Nice: Rod's light rock swing is actually contagious, and you may find yourself saying, "Hey, play that again!" about the original song that Stewart co-wrote, Red-Suited Super Man. Then you'll realize what you just said and lie that you were just kidding. Cee-Lo, Mary J. Blige, Bublé and Trombone Shorty also turn in notable cameos.

Sounds of the Holidays Vol. One – The Polyphonic Spree

Naughty: The Polyphonic Spree are known for featuring upward of 20 members, but leader Tim DeLaughter doesn't quite maximize the potential of all of his choral worker elves here.

Nice: Though many of these 13 tracks are familiar songs, the Spree drastically reimagine many of them to great effect. Silver Bells, featuring School of the Seven Bells, is a dreamy seven-minute symphony that captures the exhausting wonder of the season through the sleepy eyes of a child.

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Breaking down Rihanna's changing hairstyles

The many faces and styles of Rihanna. HANDOUT

Exclusive interview. Metro speaks to pop star's personal hair stylist about what goes into creating her public image

ANNA SOKOLOWSKI
scene@metronews.ca

Pop sensation Rihanna is just about as famous for her intense style changes as her incredible career in music.

The young Hollywood starlet, whose exotic beauty is inherited from the island of Barbados, has been present in the public eye for the past seven years, ever since her breakthrough hit Pon de Replay in 2005.

Rihanna's recent tour that went with the name 777 had the entire world talking yet again — the seven-day tour started from Los Angeles and finished off in New York with stops in Mexico City, Toronto, Stockholm, Paris, Berlin and London.

Apart from a strictly selected list of press guests and fans, Rihanna's little entourage included her right-hand man — her personal hair stylist Yusef Williams.

Metro received the exclusive opportunity to dive deeper into Rihanna's style secrets with Williams, who has quickly become one of America's most wanted hair specialists.

"My brain is always working when it comes to creating new looks," Williams declares.

The stylist admits that he always keeps Rihanna's unique taste and ideas in mind when putting together imaginative style creations for the artist.

When the two are apart and searching for inspiration separately, Rihanna often sends Williams inspirational pictures through her phone.

"We aim to create looks that Rihanna feels comfortable in, which makes my work so spontaneous. Actually, we pull a lot of inspiration from men's magazines," Williams reveals.

Throughout her career, Rihanna has changed the colour, cut and length of her luscious locks innumerable times.

Drastic changes take their toll and continuous travelling results in dryness even when you are an international celebrity.

Nevertheless, when the bombshell is on tour, there is no spare time for time-consuming treatments.

"Our basic hair care routine starts with tying Rihanna's hair down before she goes to bed. We moisturize both her scalp and hair with organic olive oil-based leave-in conditioners. This step is crucial and it (keeps) her hair healthy," Williams instructs.

Rihanna has gone from pixie crops and ballet buns to dreadlocks and asymmetric hairdos over the years. But what can we expect to see next?

The stylist claims that the superstar's future looks are impossible to plan ahead of time.

"Her current look is short on the sides, but it could be practically anything tomorrow. That's the beauty of Rihanna and that is why I love working with her," the stylist concludes.

Stylin'

"We aim to create looks that Rihanna feels comfortable in."

Yusef Williams
Rihanna's stylist.

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METRO DISH

OUR TAKE ON THE WORLD OF CELEBRITIES

The Word

The year in celebrity divorces

THE WORD
Dorothy Robinson
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Yesterday we looked at the big celebrity engagements of 2012. (Aw, love!) So today we'll gaze at the years big celebrity divorces. (Boo, dead love!)

Katy Perry and Russell Brand
Announcement: Dec. 30 (so technically this occurred in 2011 but the fallout was in 2012. Work with me here, folks).
Length of marriage: 14 months
Reason: "She's young, successful and dedicated," Brand said of Perry and her career in an interview with Howard Stern in July. "(The reality is) you can't fully understand it until you do it. I was really into the idea of marriage and having children." Translation: The recovering alcoholic wanted to settle down; she wanted to party.
Contention level: Low. Instead of anger, Perry just seems embarrassed she was ever associated with the comedian. She recently hid under a table to avoid seeing him while she was having lunch with new beau John Mayer.

Heidi Klum and Seal
Announcement: Jan. 23
Length of marriage: 7 years
Reason: Klum was apparently disturbed about Seal's "inability to control his temper."
Contention level: High. The two are currently involved in a very bitter custody dispute over their four children and Klum's estimated $70 million fortune.

Katie Holmes and Tom Cruise
Announcement: June 29
Length of marriage: 5 years
Reason: Cruise was reportedly blindsided by Holmes' highly orchestrated divorce proceedings. One reason for the split? Us Weekly claims that the couple "fought viciously" over Scientology parenting.
Contention level: Medium. The divorce was fast and furious (by comparison, Kim Kardashian and Kris Humphries are still in negotiations). Cruise seems sad; Holmes ecstatic. And Suri is still well-dressed.

Amy Poehler and Will Arnett
Announcement: Sept. 6
Length of marriage: 9 years
Reason: Their romance "fizzled out," RadarOnline.com reported.
Contention level: Low. They are too adorable to be mad at one another.

Lindsay Lohan. ALL PHOTOS GETTY

Lohan won't follow Max and The Wanted

Lindsay Lohan has put an end to her gallivanting with on-the-road British boy band The Wanted, cancelling plans to follow the group to London and then Dubai, according to E! News.

Some suspected the change of plans was caused by Lohan's legal troubles, but the starlet is allowed to leave the country while on probation. Perhaps it's because her recent infatuation with Wanted member Max George reportedly isn't all that serious. "All they're doing is hanging out," a source says.

Twitter

@KChenoweth
No one will see Paranormal Activity 4 with me.

@RealMichelleT
What would the Dowager Countess do?

@msleamichele
Another great day of work at #glee! Time to get some rest now! Another big day tomorrow! Xoxo

@rustyrockets
"@JonahHill: Ok so I've decided I'm going to get married soon, I'm just not sure to who yet" I'm free.

Florence Welch

Florence the peacemaker at recent concert

Florence + the Machine singer Florence Welch turned peacemaker at a recent concert in Scotland, halting the show when she spotted two fans quarreling in the front row, according to Us Weekly. "I can't have a fight in front of me while I'm singing this song! No fighting allowed," she said. "I don't know what's happening but I'd like it to stop. It doesn't matter whose fault it is." Others in the crowd weren't pleased with the interruption and had begun chuckling nervously, causing Welch to chide them as well: "Excuse me, all of you. Stop it," she said. "I'm sorry all of you if you're upset." Welch then hopped off stage and hugged one of the fighting girls who appeared to be crying.

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LIFE 3

Bask in Rita's aura

Jay-Z's protege spills about her two-tone lip, her knack for nurturing her locks and her long-standing love for Lopez

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No one rocks a strong brow and bold lip quite like Rita Ora does. And so we felt compelled to pick her brain about her trademark look. In the process, Jay-Z's protege gave us a few tips on how to rock a two-tone red pout and the celebrity (it's J.Lo!) whose complexion she covets the most.

On her morning routine...
"In the day, it takes about 10 to 15 minutes (to put my makeup on). If I don't have to wear makeup, I don't. I don't mind being caught on camera bare-faced. And I think having healthy, glowing skin is really important. On off days, I'll wear bronzer and a lipstick, but that's it. A red lip and black liquid eyeliner would be my easiest look. It looks good on blondes — but this is all bleached! "

...and fancy, get-dressed-up, evening ritual
"If I have an event, I might stick some lashes on and maybe put on some golden, bronzy eye shadow, something to make my eyes stand out a bit more. But in the evening, it takes me probably about 25 minutes to do my makeup — if I'm doing it properly. Do you know what I'm doing right now? The other day, I wore a dress that had pink and red, so I made my top lip pink and my bottom lip red. That was quite cool. We invented that with my makeup artist. Or you can do bright red on the outside and dark red on the inside and blend it all together. The main thing is making your skin look flawless, like you have no makeup on."

She's not a natural blonde, but a natural beauty? No question. HANDOUT

Face the facts

"J.LO is my skin idol, I love her. Is that really crazy? Do I sound like a psychopath?"
Rita Ora

Her skin care before bed
"I wash my face every night and use Crème de la Mer moisturizing soft cream as it makes my skin feel nice. But my skin isn't too bad actually."

The hair: to spray or not to spray
"(My hair) takes a lot of work. I used to have really long hair, but when I started dying it and using curling irons and stuff, it dried it out. I'd literally have a hair spray in my bag, which isn't good. Now I use clip-ins so that I don't damage my own hair. I also do a lot of treatments — a lot of oils and masks. But your hair will only absorb so much oil. You also have to eat good. So I eat things like fish for the oils."

Lipstick or lip gloss?
"I love a strong lip. I would see women like Marilyn Monroe and Gwen Stefani with red lips and they never looked like they gave a s—t about what anyone had to say about them. They had such confidence. They were just hot and sexy and not afraid to be different. When I put red lipstick on, I want to be like them."

About that tan
(I feel the most beautiful) when I've got a tan!

Her beauty icons
"Kim Kardashian has good makeup. But J.LO is my skin idol, I love her. Is that really crazy? Do I sound like a psychopath? My mum's really good with makeup. She always has a different look. She used to say, 'Don't do a lip and an eye. Pick one.' I follow her advice ... sometimes."

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@Jeanne_Beker: Prepping for launch of TheLoop.ca this Thursday! With @Killer_Kurves @BigHipsRedLips @FlawsofCouture

@Jeanne_Beker: My mom sure does love her chocolate... Ready to start a sweet 93rd year!

@Jeanne_Beker: YUMMY!! In the #CTV lobby with model hunks Oren @choosethefro +@JosephCannata @TheMarilynShow

@Jeanne_Beker: With the cool+sexy @jianghomeshi @ArleneDickinson Xmas bash!

The Kit

Canadian street style

Spotted in: Halifax

Sam Rich

Student and stylist at Reginald magazine

Age: 21

What she's wearing
Kelly Wearstler coat, House of Harlow sunglasses, Chanel bag, vintage Chanel boots, J Brand jeans, Autumn cashmere sweater.

Her inspiration
"I take inspiration from blogs like Atlantic Pacific and Man Repeller, from my friends, and my mom is my ultimate fashion inspiration."

THE KIT PHOTOBLOGGER: MEGHAN TANSEY WHITTON, FASHIONEASTHALIFAX.COM

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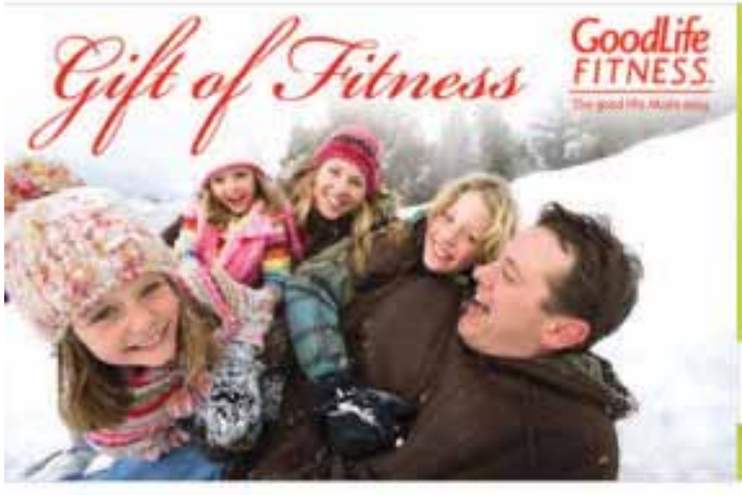

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Christmas card clutter solutions

DESIGN CENTRE
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If you are the popular type then you probably get lots of Christmas cards sent to you each holiday season.

One of the most asked questions I get during the holidays is what to do with the cards and how to creatively display them.

I remember as a kid my Mom would string them up across our window in the living room. She'd poke them into the edges of painting and mirror frames; basically ridding them of tabletops in order to make room for trays of hard candy and nuts.

I've seen cards lined up on mantels, window ledges and credenzas, stuck to the fridge door and draped on a ribbon around door frames.

For a family home that might look charmingly chaotic, it's important to create order with decor, and greeting cards are no exception.

As a designer type, I am always conscious of displaying things around my home that add to my decor — especially during the holidays. Here's a few ways that inspire me to proudly put those warm wishes on display.

Jolly Reindeer Photo Holder

At almost three–feet tall, I'd stand this hand-painted fellow in my front foyer as a greeter to guests when they arrive. $40, pier1.ca.

Card Keeper

Got keepsake cards? Store them away neatly (it's also a good way to remember who sent you cards from year to year). $12, crateandbarrel.com.

Holiday Card Holder

Organize 60 cards horizontally on a hallway wall or vertically beside the Christmas tree. $65, potterybarn.com.

Idea: lay your holiday greeting cards in a decorative tray and display on a coffee table. Allow guests to sift through them as desired.
PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Greeting Card Etiquette

- Display your cards into common groups: work related, family and friends.
- At the end of the season, gather all cards and store them with holiday decorations for next year. You'll then have an auto-list of people to send cards to.
- Up-cycle last year's extra-beautiful cards and use the front plackets as instant name tags for gifts. Just make sure there is no writing on the inside front.
- If someone sends you a card and its too late in the season to return one to them, send them a "thank you for thinking of me card" in the new year.
- Always include your return address on the envelope and sign the card with your first and last name. This ensures the receiver knows who it came from.

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Turntable to coffee table: Vintage holiday decor

Forget Bing Crosby's classic White Christmas. For me, Christmastime will forever be evoked by David Cassidy crooning My Christmas Card to You, and I still have the 1972 Partridge Family holiday record album to prove it.

The music has long since been transferred to my iPod, but the rest of my family can stand only so much of Cassidy's oddly melancholy rendition of Frosty the Snowman. So I came up with another way to get my fix of nostalgia: I reproduced the album cover art on a tile coaster that now resides on my coffee table, not my parents' old turntable. In fact, I had enough vintage albums to make a set of four holiday coasters, and at a cost of 15 cents per tile, can afford to make more to give to my sister.

But why stop there? I'm also awfully fond of my 1973 Little Golden Book versions of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and Frosty the Snowman, and I get out my battered copies every year. But the books end up lost amid my son's enormous collection, so I came up with a way to make them part of our holiday decor.

Instead of shrinking the covers as I did for the albums, I enlarged them a bit to fit 8-by-10-inch canvases and hung them on the wall. Slapping a print into a frame would be even easier, but I had the blank canvas on hand and didn't want to buy a new frame. I may be a hopeless sap during the holidays, but I'm also thrifty.

A handmade drink coaster inspired by vintage Christmas albums.
HOLLY RAMER/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A decorative wall hanging inspired by vintage Christmas books.
HOLLY RAMER/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Record album coasters

Materials

- Record album covers
- Scanner or digital camera
- Printer
- Craft knife and metal ruler or scissors
- Spray adhesive or adhesive tape (I used a Scotch-brand Advanced Tape Glider)
- Ceramic tiles, approximately 4-by-4 inches
- Clear enamel topcoat (I used Rust-oleum Crystal Clear Enamel)
- Felt, cut to the size of the coasters

Instructions

1. Take a picture of your album cover. Scanning it would also work, but most small, desktop scanners won't be big enough to scan the entire cover in one pass. It's best to stand the album up on a shelf against a wall, so you can get a straight-on view for a photo.

2. Use photo-editing or word-processing software to crop and re-size the image to fit your tile. Print the image, then trim it to size using the craft knife or scissors.

3. Use adhesive tape or spray adhesive to glue the image to the tile. Many online tutorials call for using Mod Podge, a type of decoupage medium, for this kind of project, but I find it messy. And because it is water-based, the finished coasters likely will not stand up to moisture or heat from a cold beverage glass or warm mug.

4. Allow adhesive to dry thoroughly, following product directions. Working outdoors, apply several light coats of the clear enamel spray, again following the product directions for how long to wait between coats.

5. Glue squares of felt to the underside of the tiles to prevent the rough surface from scratching your table.

6. Allow the finished coaster to dry for at least several days before using.

Book cover canvases

Materials

- Vintage books
- Scanner or digital camera
- Printer
- Craft knife or scissors
- Spray adhesive or adhesive tape
- Blank 8-by-10-inch canvas
- Optional: acrylic craft paint

Instructions:

1. Scan or take a picture of your book cover. If scanning, scan at a high resolution (600 ppi) so you can print an enlarged copy without harming the image quality. If taking a picture, use the highest resolution on your camera.

2. Use photo-editing or word-processing software to crop and re-size the image to fit your canvas. (Alternatively, you can simply create a duplicate image that you can print and frame).

3. Print the image, then trim it to size. I chose to print my book cover on high-quality photo paper to get the best image possible.

4. If desired, paint the edges of the canvas a colour that matches your book cover. Let dry.

5. Use adhesive tape or spray to glue the image onto the canvas.

6. If desired, spray the finished canvas with a clear sealant. I chose not to, since it will be hanging up for just a few weeks each year, and I wasn't particularly worried about the image fading or getting damaged.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DIY DECOR TIP: UPCYCLED HOLIDAY BULBS

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It happens every year: You untangle your holiday lights only to find that half aren't working.

Don't toss 'em out quite yet; upcycle those burnt out bulbs into a fabulously festive centerpiece!

Don't just throw away those burnt-out Christmas lights. SUBMITTED

Materials

- Holiday light bulbs
- Various shades of glitter, divided
- White glue
- Artist's brush
- Large Decorative bowl
- Fake snow

Directions

1. Decant various shades of glitter into separate bowls.
2. Using a small artist's brush, apply glue to the entire glass portion of each bulb.
3. Dip bulb in one of the bowls of glitter and roll around, ensuring that glue is completely covered with glitter.
4. Repeat steps two and three with remaining bulbs.
5. Allow bulbs to fully dry separately before displaying together in a large decorative bowl on a bed of fake snow.

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Anitra Mecadon, host of DIY Network's Mega Dens. HANDOUT

Creating guest bedrooms where there aren't any

DIY ideas. Make guests feel welcome at your home this holiday season and into the new year

With the holidays around the corner, preparing for overnight guests is inevitable.

Rather than looking at your lack of guest suites as a challenge, consider these ideas for incorporating guest beds into functional living spaces.

Hideaway beds

Fold up the hideaway bed stereotype in your head — newer versions of this classic space saver are both more comfortable and easier to use.

Including one of these in a contemporary cabinet provides an attractive solution for overnight guests without taking up any additional space.

Wall dividers

Make the most of a room by using a wall divider to separate a guest bedroom from a room you are already using such as a home office or gym.

Using mirrored panels or patterned dividers make the room stylish for your use and your guests when they arrive.

Small spaces

Look at the unused nooks and crannies in your home that could be serving a more creative purpose.

For instance, building a simple platform underneath the stairs can easily provide room for a futon or air mattress without invading the space you already have.

Trundle beds

Doubling as a great solution for kids' sleepovers, a trundle bed is two beds that take the space of one. The second bed is tucked underneath and rolls out when needed.

This is a great solution for additional guests that doesn't take up any extra space in your home.

Moveable partitions

If you have no choice but to sleep guests in high traffic areas of your home, installing a partition will provide the necessary privacy.

Consider moving bookshelves or glass doors that will keep an open feeling and won't entirely divide the overall room.

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Baby shrimp and crab meat make a delicious duo in delicate fried cakes

ROSE REISMAN
for more, visit
rosereisman.com

I love the traditional fried crab cakes served in restaurants, but are they ever high in calories and fat! Here I've used a combination of baby shrimp and crabmeat and sautéed them in a very small amount of oil. The low-fat mayonnaise sauce goes beautifully with these delicate cakes.

They end up at 99 calories and 5.8 grams of fat per serving.

1. To make the cakes, combine the crabmeat, shrimp, mayonnaise, lemon juice, green onion, cilantro, bread crumbs, egg, garlic, ginger and mustard in a food processor. Finely chop until the mixture just comes together. Don't purée. Alternatively, chop by hand.

2. Form into 6 cakes.

3. Spray a non-stick skillet with cooking oil. Add the vegetable oil and place over medium heat. Sauté the cakes for about 5 minutes per side, or just until browned and hot.

4. To make the sauce, combine the mayonnaise, sour cream, sesame oil and soy sauce in a serving bowl. Whisk until smooth.

5. Garnish the cakes with the diced red pepper and serve the sauce alongside. **ROSE REISMAN'S COMPLETE LIGHT KITCHEN (WHITECAP BOOKS) BY ROSE REISMAN**

Ingredients

Cakes
- 6 oz chopped crabmeat (or surimi)
- 4 oz baby shrimp (cooked)
- 3 tbsp light mayonnaise
- 2 tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/4 cup chopped green onion
- 1/4 cup chopped cilantro
- 1/2 cup dried unseasoned bread crumbs
- 1 large egg
- 1 tsp crushed fresh garlic
- 1/2 tsp crushed fresh ginger
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp vegetable oil

Sauce
- 1 tbsp light mayonnaise
- 2 tbsp low-fat sour cream
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 1 tsp low-sodium soy sauce

Garnish
- 1/4 cup finely diced red bell pepper

Asian Crab and Shrimp Cakes

This recipe serves six. BRIAN MACDONALD, FROM ROSE REISMAN'S COMPLETE LIGHT KITCHEN (WHITECAP BOOKS)

Cookbook of the Week

Seafood made easy

Love seafood but don't have the time to get creative with cooking it? Enter 200 Best Canned Fish & Seafood Recipes by Susan Sampson.

The book is full of traditional and updated recipes, new creations and canned twists on classic fish dishes. The recipes feature canned seafood that can be found in virtually any supermarket across Canada: tuna, crab, salmon, mackerel, cod, sardines, clams, oysters, mussels and more.

Master dishes such as Salad Nicoise, Fish Tacos, Lemon Pepper-Shrimp Pasta, Lobster Mushroom Bisque, Crab Cakes, Tuna and Spinach Risotto and more. **METRO**

Taste the rainbow — trout with relish that is

This recipe serves six. NEWS CANADA

1. Trout: Preheat the oven to 425 F (220 C). Arrange trout on a lightly greased, foil-lined baking sheet. Sprinkle evenly with salt and pepper. Blend oil with mustard, vinegar and thyme; brush evenly over the trout. Roast for 8 to 10 minutes or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork.

2. Relish: Meanwhile, heat oil in a large, non-stick skillet set over medium-high heat. Add onion, mushrooms, thyme, salt and pepper. Cook, stirring often, for 5 to 7 minutes or until browned. Stir in roasted red pepper, vinegar and garlic. Cook, stirring, for 1 to 2 minutes or until glossy.

3. Spoon mushroom relish over trout. Garnish with parsley (if using) and serve with lemon wedges. **NEWS CANADA/ ARTHRITIS.CA**

Ingredients

Trout
- 2 lbs (1 kg) boneless rainbow trout, about 2 large fillets
- 1/4 tsp (1 ml) each salt, pepper
- 1 tbsp (15 ml) each olive oil and Dijon mustard
- 2 tsp (10 ml) white wine vinegar
- 1/4 tsp (1 ml) dried thyme

Relish
- 1 tbsp (15 ml) olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped
- 2 cups (500 ml) sliced cremini or white mushrooms
- 1/2 tsp (2 ml) dried thyme
- 1/4 tsp (1 ml) each salt, pepper
- 1/2 cup (125 ml) chopped roasted red pepper
- 1 tsp (5 ml) white wine vinegar
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Chopped parsley (optional)
- Lemon wedges

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Cake creations keep kids busy

The new boss. Next time your kids are bored, give them some Play-Doh and a cake challenge

SHARON DEVELLIS
YummyMummyClub.ca

Tony Danza used to be "the boss." Or there's Bruce Springsteen.

Nowadays, there's a new boss in town. It's Buddy Valastro, the uber-talented cake creator/decorator/owner of Carlo's Bakery, and thanks to a little network called TLC, he is known to the world as the Cake Boss.

We don't watch a lot of television at our house but there are a few shows we watch together as a family: America's Funniest Videos, Antiques Roadshow, Wipe Out, and, of course, Cake Boss.

The boys are addicted and love watching Valastro create cakes that defy gravity (and sometimes don't). But they especially love the spin-off series — The Next Great Baker — where, for eight episodes, Valastro had a competition to find a new baker for Carlo's bakery. Each week Valastro threw new challenges at the 10 contestants as they vied for a chance to win $50,000 and work at the famous bakery.

This has spurred a new activity for my kids.

Cake Boss: The Play-Doh Edition

I wish I could take credit for this, but my husband came up with the idea when the kids brought out their mounds of Play-Doh after dinner one night. Essentially, one of us is "The Boss" and we tell both of our sons what kind of cake to make.

Example: We would like a cake that represents Lego. It needs to be layered and able to feed 20 to 30 people. You have one hour.

Then we set the timer and let the boys create. Bonus: My husband and I have one hour to do other things while they are at the table stretching their Play-Doh and imaginations. Once I was able to dye my hair while they made Valentine's Day-inspired cakes. And just the other day I managed to vacuum the entire house, including under the couches. Which, ironically, is where I found half of their missing Lego pieces. I wonder how many pieces our central vacuum system can suck up before it actually explodes.

So the next time your kids are bored and need something to do, grab some Play-Doh and go show them who is really the boss.

Once you have assigned your kids with a cake challenge and set the timer, you will have one free hour to yourself. ISTOCKPHOTO/THINKSTOCK

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With all the hustle this time of year, take time to relax with the family and watch a movie. GOODSHOOT/THINKSTOCK

Film fest perfect for the holidays

EILEEN FISHER
YummyMummyClub.ca

With cold wintry days and Christmas craziness calling out for people to stop and take a break, watching a favourite holiday movie is something that every kid loves to do.

My kids are no different, and there are certain holiday movies that are pretty much guaranteed to make them stop, drop, and sit for a bit. With all of the hustle and bustle at this time of year, relaxing is something we sometimes forget to do.

Here are some of my family's favourite Christmas movies and the reason why we always have a supply of movie snacks on hand in our kitchen during the whole month of December.

Will Ferrell as Buddy in the movie Elf. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

Elf

Over the past few years, this movie has quickly beat out all of the others as our family's favourite one to watch at Christmas.

It's got a funny innocent charm about it that just makes you smile the minute you see Will Ferrell. The humour in the film appeals to all ages, and it has an awesome message. And, no, the message is not, "We elves try to stick to the four main food groups: Candy, candy canes, candy corns, and syrup." Quotes by Buddy are standard around this house in December.

National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation

This movie is the inspiration behind everything to do with Christmas lights and family gatherings.

It's also the reason why I refer to my husband solely as "Clark" for the whole month of December. If it's Christmas Eve and the rooms of your house are filled with family members who are eating all of your food, trashing your kitchen and setting your tree on fire, you have just become a Griswold. There's no sense fighting it — embrace it.

A Christmas Story

"You'll shoot your eye out!" Can you believe this movie was made almost 30 years ago?

The kids love this movie because of how it portrays Ralphie using his "inside voice" to talk about what he really thinks of all the unreasonable aspects of Christmas. Like wearing a pink bunny suit or having your dad obsess over a lamp shaped like a lady's leg.

I wonder if Ralphie eventually ended up in therapy?

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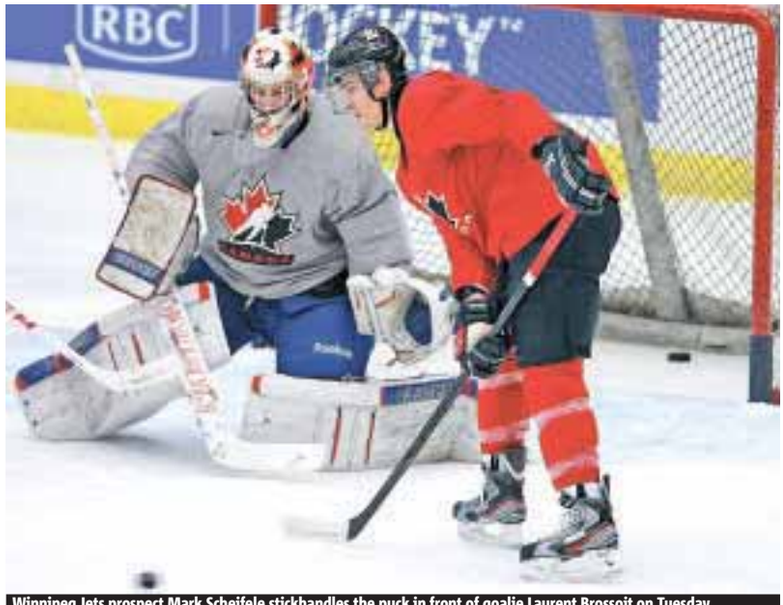
downtown WINNIPEG BIZ

Scheifele adapts to the wing on juniors' top line

World junior selection camp. Forward says right-wing experience to this point was limited to a few practices with the Jets



Winnipeg Jets prospect Mark Scheifele stickhandles the puck in front of goalie Laurent Brossoit on Tuesday at junior team selection camp in Calgary. Scheifele was among a dozen players who did not take part in the game against the University of Alberta on Wednesday. JEFF MCINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS

It was a just a year ago that Mark Scheifele declared he wanted to centre Canada's top forward line at the world junior hockey championship.

He didn't get his way. That distinction went to Ryan Strome with Scheifele playing the middle on Canada's second line.

Scheifele looks like he will get a chance to play on the top unit this year, but as a converted right-winger.

Canadian team head coach Steve Spott had Scheifele on the right side of Edmonton Oilers centre Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and left-winger Jonathan Huberdeau from the start of this week's selection camp in Calgary.

"I'm willing to play any position, whatever it is," Scheifele says. "Obviously being on the No. 1 line right now with Huberdeau and Nugent-Hopkins, I just want to stay on that, obviously make the team."

That he'll make the team isn't in question. The 19-year-old from Kitchener, Ont., would have played for the Winnipeg Jets this season if not for the NHL lockout.

Spott began preparing Scheifele, the six-foot-three, 187-pound forward, for the switch to right wing with the call to invite him to selection camp.

With the help of his Barrie Colts head coach Dale Hawerchuk, a former Jet himself, Scheifele worked on chipping the puck up the boards and getting the puck to the centre on the fly during practices prior to his arrival in Calgary.

"You've got to battle more along the walls especially," Scheifele said. "It's a good thing to add to your resumé. If you can play right wing, it gives coaches at the next level a different opportunity."

Scheifele, Nugent-Hopkins and Huberdeau were among a dozen players who didn't play in Wednesday's 4-1 exhibition loss to the University of Alberta Golden Bears.

Canadian defenceman Frank Corrado of the Sudbury Wolves scored for the second time in as many days. He scored the winner in the previous night's intrasquad game.

Malcolm Subban had a tough start in Canada's net as he gave up three goals on Alberta's first seven shots, but settled down and made 11 saves. Jordan Binnington then turned away seven of eight in his half of the game.

Laurent Brossoit and Jake Paterson, the two other goalies competing for three spots on Canada's roster, tended Alberta's nets. Brossoit stopped 18 of 19 shots before giving way to Paterson, who stopped the 12 he faced.

"There are some players in my mind here this evening that didn't take advantage of a very good opportunity," Spott said. "I know there's very good players in the stands, but there's jobs to be had here. I said from Day 1, 'Don't have any regrets,' and I think some players may have some after tonight."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Wednesday's cuts

Defencemen Adam Pelech and Derrick Pouliot and forwards Francis Beauvillier, Sean Monahan and Tyler Graovac were cut from the team, dropping the number of players competing for 23 spots on the team to 32.

- Four goalies, 10 defencemen and 18 forwards remain.
- Another nine hopefuls are expected to be released Thursday.
- Canada's roster for the world junior hockey championship in Ufa, Russia, will also be named then.

NFL

Funeral held for former Chiefs linebacker

Jovan Belcher was remembered Wednesday for the accomplishments of a life that ended so suddenly and violently.

Several hundred mourners gathered for the Kansas City Chiefs linebacker's funeral near his hometown on Long Island. The 25-year-old Belcher shot and killed his girlfriend on Dec. 1, then drove to the Chiefs practice facility and committed suicide in front of team officials.

Pastor Dawn Mixon shared that Belcher's mother, Cheryl Shepherd, described him as a "humble, kind young man."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Tennis

Raonic named Tennis Canada player of the year

Rising singles star Milos Raonic has won Tennis Canada's male player of the year award for the second straight year.

Raonic, from Thornhill, Ont., won two ATP World Tour titles in 2012 and ended the season as the highest-ranked North American player at No. 13.

"It was a great season but I'm working to continue to grow and develop as a player," Raonic said Wednesday in a release.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Milos Raonic GETTY IMAGES FILE

Latest lockout meeting sees no progress

The latest round of NHL labour talks ended with the two sides not even getting into the same room with each other.

The players' association and league negotiators met separately Wednesday with federal mediators in suburban New Jersey, holding discussions that didn't immediately appear to have moved the sides any closer to a deal to save the hockey season.

There was hope going into Wednesday that negotiations could get back on track to the point they were last Thursday before talks fell apart.

Quoted

"I thought the gap would be closed much quicker, but it hasn't come to fruition yet, so we have to keep working."

Brendan Morrison, one of 13 players to attend the latest talks on Wednesday.

When the NHL agreed last week to increase its make-whole offer of deferred payments from $211 million US to $300 million, it was part of a proposed package that required the union to agree on three non-negotiable points. Instead, the players' association accepted the raise in funds, but then made counter-proposals on the issues the league stated had no wiggle room.

NHL commissioner Gary Bettman then said that the offer was being pulled from the table. However, mediators informed the union on Wednesday that the proposal was still available, but it carried a take-it-or-leave-it ultimatum.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Commissioner Gary Bettman heads uptown to address the media following the NHL board of governors meeting last week in New York. BRUCE BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES

Jones set to return at B.C. tournament

Curling. After surgery and pregnancy, Jones will make her return and prep for next year's Olympic qualifier

Jennifer Jones will make her season debut at the World Financial Group Continental Cup. JONATHAN HAYWARD/THE CANADIAN PRESS

With new daughter Isabella in tow, Jennifer Jones will make her return to the ice in less than a month.

The curling star will make her season debut in Penticton, B.C., when she skips her team in the World Financial Group Continental Cup.

Jones not only had Isabella a month early in mid-November but has also recovered from knee surgery she had last spring to clean up ligament issues in her right pushing leg.

"It caught me a little off guard but she's healthy," Jones says of the surprise birth in Barrie, Ont., while she was visiting partner and Glen Howard second Brent Laing.

"I've been back on the ice for a few weeks now. I got back on the ice right away and I feel great."

That positive attitude hasn't been hurt by the performance of her team while she was away.

"I'm so proud of them," she said. "They had a great fall and they've been playing really well and hopefully we can continue their great play into the new year."

Team Jones, with third Kaitlyn Lawes in charge, made it all the way to the final of the Canada Cup Dec. 2, dropping a close one to Saskatoon's Stefanie Lawton.

Jones is on maternity leave as a corporate lawyer with the former Wellington West Group, now owned by National Bank and part of National Bank Financial.

But she's not on mat leave from curling, as she gets ready to lead her squad into a season that will prepare them for next December's Olympic qualifier in Winnipeg.

She earned one of the first spots in the qualifier in 2011, easing a lot of the pressure other teams are now facing.

"For us, this fall was just all about trying to get some games in and the timing worked out great for me to take a little bit of a break," she said.

This was the second season in a row that Jones' team has missed one of its members for the early part of the season. A year earlier, veteran second Jill Officer also took the fall off to have a baby but returned quickly.

"Jill basically took the same amount of time off that I did," Jones said.

Jones is one of Canada's most successful curlers — nine trips to the Scotties Tournaments of Hearts (four wins plus two silvers and one bronze), one world championship in 2008 and a bronze at another in 2010.

The Continental Cup is set for Jan. 10-13 and Jones won't have a lot of downtime afterward. The Manitoba Scotties are set for Jan. 23-27, and she has to defend her title if she wants to get back to the nationals. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Quoted

"Obviously the Olympics would be fantastic, but this year was all about trying to see if we can get better, then we'll focus and see what we can do at the Olympic trials"

Canadian curler Jennifer Jones

Mark Hominick lands a punch on Jose Aldo at UFC 129. Hominick announced his retirement from MMA fighting on Tuesday. RENE JOHNSTON/TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

MMA. Hominick throws in towel on fighting career

In the end, Mark (The Machine) Hominick couldn't meet his own high standards.

The 30-year-old featherweight from Thamesford, Ont., announced his retirement as a pro MMA fighter via Fuel TV's UFC Tonight on Tuesday.

"I think it's the right move, at the right time," Hominick said in an interview Wednesday.

"I think I belong at the top of the food chain in the featherweight division. I think I belong with the Jose Aldo (the UFC champion), in that echelon of fighter. And if I'm not competing and winning at that level, then I think it's time for me to move on with my career."

And with a second daughter just weeks away, Hominick says he can no longer commit to the kind of intense training needed. It's a sacrifice he can no longer make to his family. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Top players

Former NHLers honoured with Order of Hockey

Paul Henderson, Dave King and Mark Messier were named to the Order of Hockey in Canada on Wednesday.

The 2013 class will be honoured by Hockey Canada in April at a ceremony in Ottawa during the 2013 IIHF women's world hockey championship. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Mark Messier has 1,887 points in 1,756 games over 25 seasons. ELISE AMENDOLA/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Horoscopes

Aries
March 21 - April 20
Focus on what you are good at and forget the rest. If you play to your strengths, you will soon be on the road to fame and fortune. Stop listening to what everyone else is saying and do only what motivates you.

Taurus
April 21 - May 21
Chances are you will have a flash of insight today that reveals how you can earn big money in the not too distant future. Don't forget though that the future depends a lot on what you do right now, so get busy.

Gemini
May 22 - June 21
Today's new moon is sure to bring changes in one or more important relationships. Whether they are the kind of changes you enjoy remains to be seen but they are certainly changes that are needed, so don't fight them.

Cancer
June 22 - July 23
The more you do now, while you are in the mood to work, the less you will have to do later when you are not. Just remember that you don't have to do something simply because everyone else is doing it.

Leo
July 24 - Aug. 23
A new moon in the most creative area of your chart gives you the kind of confidence you need to move mountains. Both in your personal life and at work you are capable of great things, so don't sell your talents short.

Virgo
Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
Sometimes it is smart to let your rivals win and this could be one of those occasions. If it gives them the impression that you are losing your grip, it will make it easier for you to win the battles that count!

Libra
Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Someone you meet today could become more than just a friend, so get up and get out into the world. If a stranger catches your eye, follow it up with a smile and a chat. One thing leads to another.

Scorpio
Oct. 2 04 - Nov. 22
You need to come to a decision today about a money matter and the planets will make it easy for you. There is really only one option on the table that is worth pursuing, so commit to it and make it pay.

Sagittarius
Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
A new moon in your birth sign means you will find it easy to get your way over the next 24 hours. Does that fill your head with all sorts of outrageous ideas? It should! There are no limits (for you).

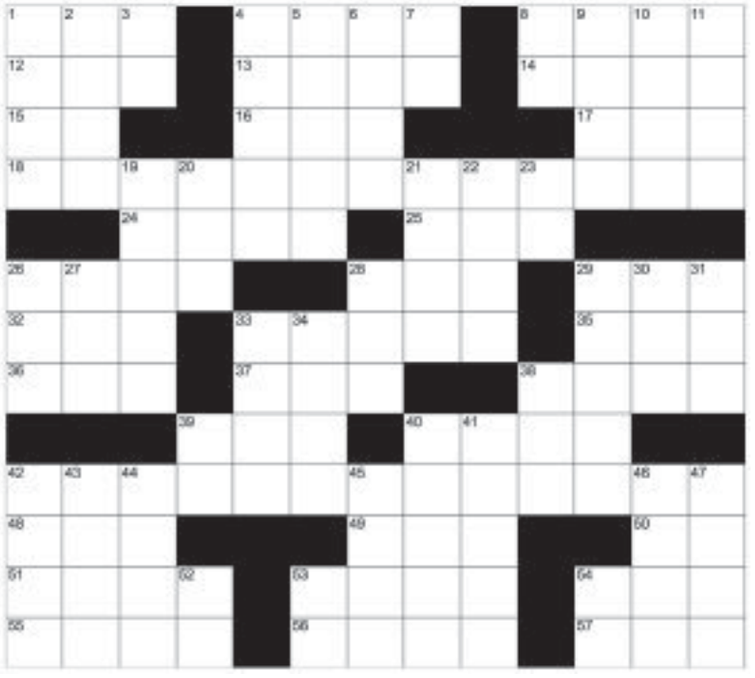
Capricorn
Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
How and why did you allow yourself to get worked up about something so trivial? Whatever the reason, you must now stand back from the situation and see it for what it is: a minor inconvenience, nothing more.

Aquarius
Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
You will need to choose between one group of friends and another today. Your time is limited and you can only do justice to one set of commitments, so choose wisely. You can make it up to your other friends later.

Pisces
Feb. 20 - March 20
Don't get so carried away with your plans and big ideas that you overlook the little things on which they depend. Remember: genius is 10 per cent inspiration and 90 per cent perspiration – yes, even for a Pisces. **SALLY BROMPTON**

Crossword

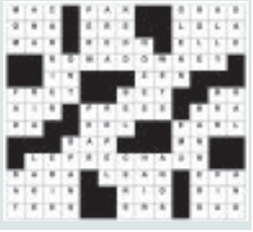
BY BETTY MARTIN



Across
1. Nightmare street
4. Ruse
8. Asian nurse
12. Cocoon
13. Comic/actress Tomlin
14. Ward of Once and Again
15. Musical group: — Vogue
16. American Music Awards (abbr.)
17. Refusals
18. 1970's Dick Van Patten series (3 words)
24. Toward sunrise
25. Sanford and —
26. Planet nearest but one to earth
28. — Paulo, Brazil
29. Coffee container
32. Aspire
33. Repeat over
35. Oath affirmation (2 words)
36. Speech hesitation
37. Runner
38. The — Griffith Show
39. Coupe or convertible
40. Send forth
42. Beatles hit song (4 words)
48. Stout
49. Boathouse item
50. Medical drama which starred George Clooney
51. Emily of New —
53. Small branch
54. Form of address
55. Hang
56. Model MacPherson
57. Capone and Capp

Down
1. Fencing sword
2. Burt Reynolds ex.
3. Marcus Welby, —
4. Some shoes
5. Margin
6. Woe is me!
7. — Wife and Kids
8. – The World Turn
9. Restaurant offering
10. Like a bump on – – (2 words)
11. Jumble
19. Bacteria
20. This Hour — 22 Minutes
21. Actor Morales of NYPD Blue
22. Lunch time for many
23. "Strangers – a Train"
26. Screen siren West
27. "— America"
28. Droop
29. Mottled bean
30. The — Couple
31. Christmas trinket
33. Type of horse
34. Wise one
38. Be indisposed
39. Hartford state.
40. High-tech message
41. Unite
42. Sleep under the stars
43. Salve plant
44. Inert gas
45. Wail
46. Bridal accessory
47. Goofs
52. Fargo state
53. — Diem
54. Peru's continent (abbr.)

Yesterday's Crossword



What's online

See today's answers metronews.ca/answers.

Sudoku

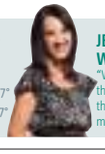
How to play
Fill in the grid, so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1-9. There is no math involved. You solve the puzzle with reasoning and logic.

		8	2		4	6		
	2		7		6		5	
6								8
		5	4	2	1	9		
		3	9	5	8	4		
2								6
	3		5		2		9	
		4	3		7	1		

Yesterday's Sudoku

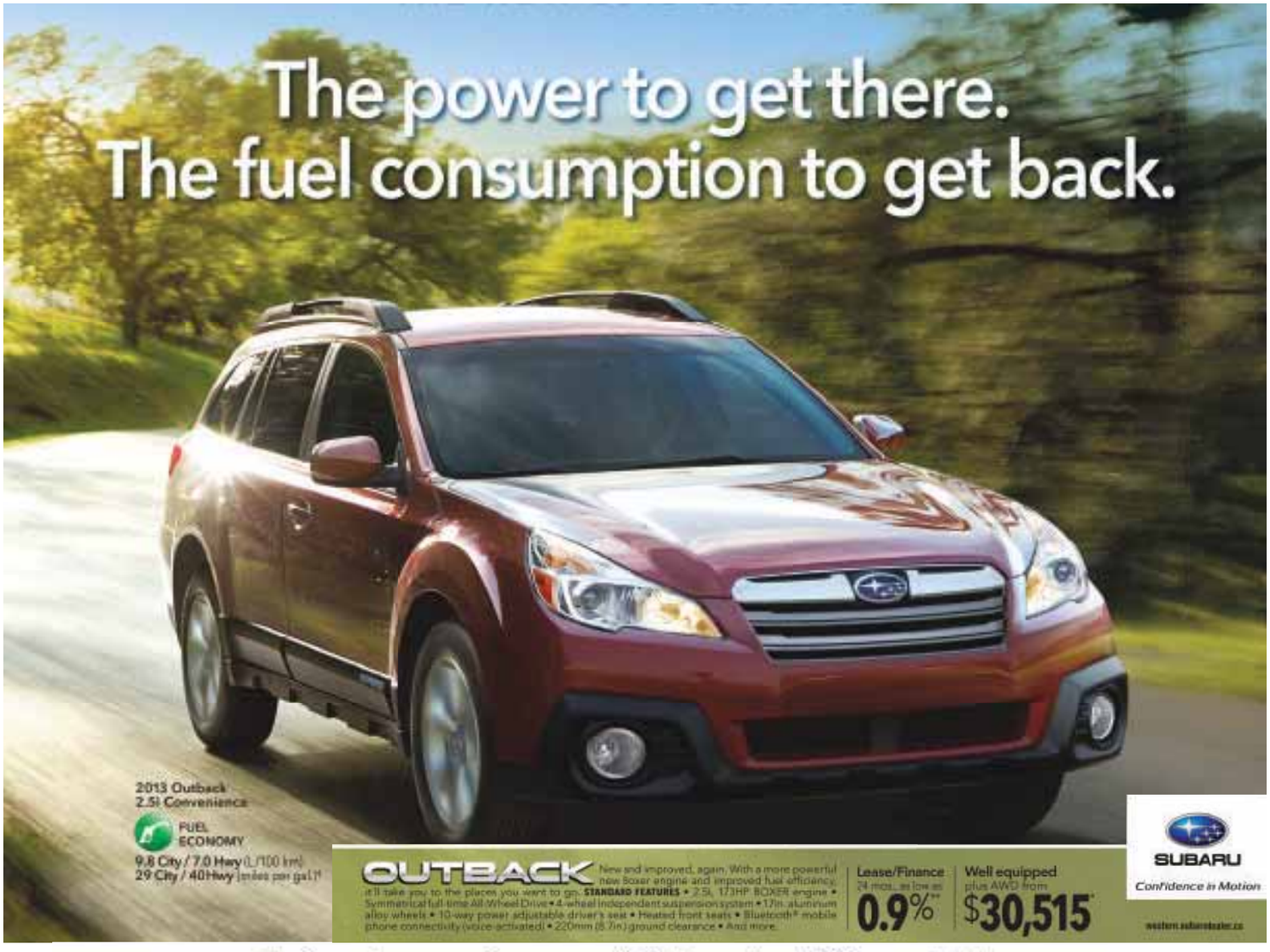
Weather

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
MAX: -17° MIN: -21°	MAX: -15° MIN: -16°	MAX: -7° MIN: -7°



BT BREAKFAST TELEVISION

JENNA KHAN
WEATHER SPECIALIST
"Weather impacts everything we do. Providing the information you need before you head out that door and take on the day is the best part of my morning." **WEEKDAYS 6 AM**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The fuel consumption to get back.
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